

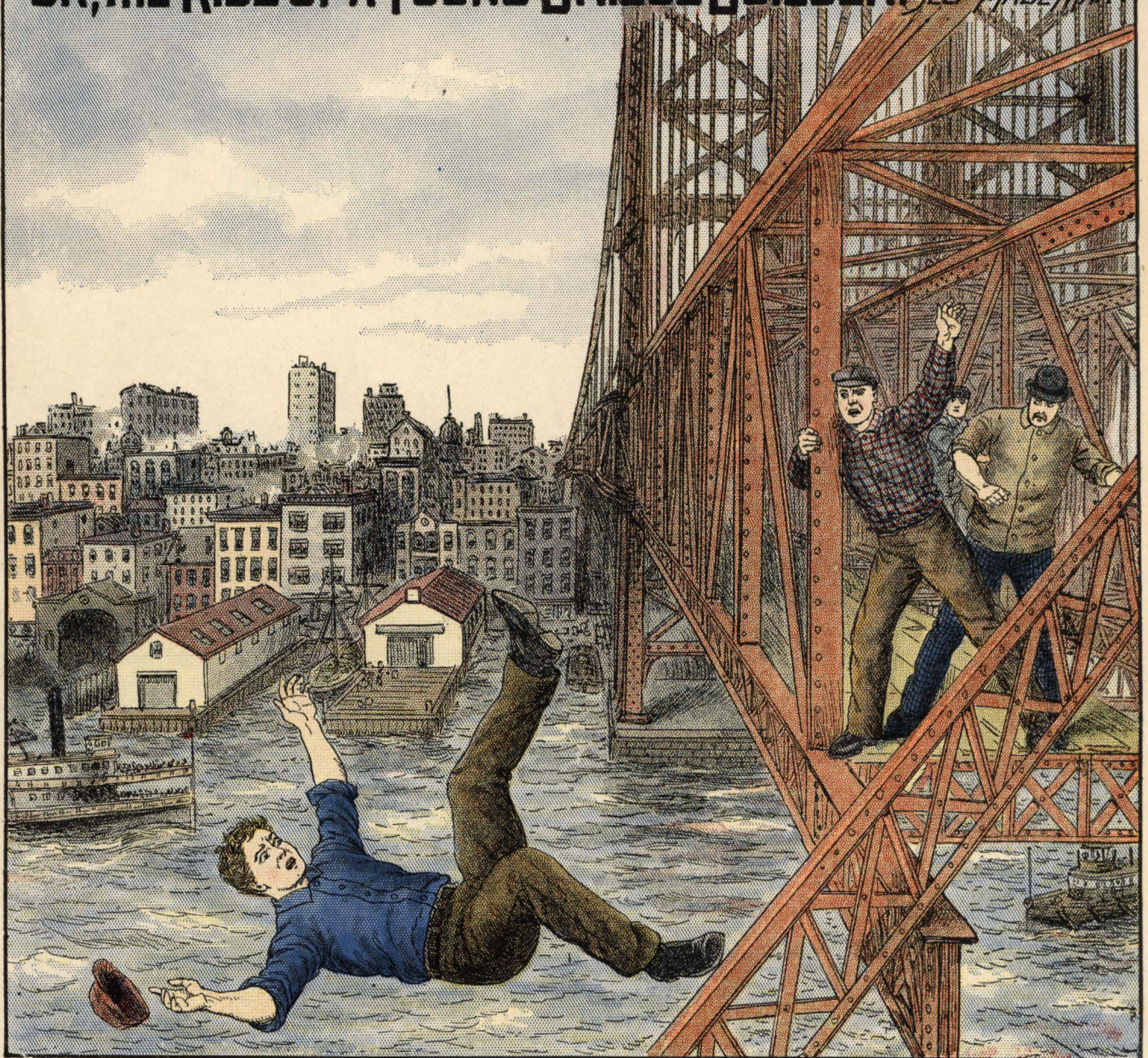
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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

FROM FOUNDRY BOY TO STEEL KING,
OR, THE RISE OF A YOUNG BRIDGE BUILDER. *BY A SELF-MADE MAN*



As the hoisting cable broke, the steel beam fell, knocking Ralph from the bridge. Down he plunged toward the river, and the startled men uttered a yell of alarm. Death stared the boy in the face during that terrible fall,

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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FROM FOUNDRY BOY TO STEEL PRINCE

OR,

THE RISE OF A YOUNG BRIDGE BUILDER

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

RALPH AVERTS A POSSIBLE TRAGEDY.

"Well, what has kept you so late? Do you see that it is after seven o'clock?" said Obadiah Bates, a small, dried-up specimen of humanity, petulantly to a stalwart, good-looking boy who had just walked into the living-room at the back of the roadhouse and tavern of which Mr. Bates was the proprietor.

The building stood on the river bank, almost overlapping the water, and facing the country road which, a hundred yards farther on, merged itself into one of the streets on the outskirts of the city of Detroit.

Cottages occupied by the laborers and artisans who worked in a large iron foundry half a mile away in the environs of the city filled up the foreground in the vicinity of the roadhouse.

From the rear windows of the tavern a good view could be had of the town of Windsor on the Canadian side of the river.

The roadhouse, being the only place in the immediate vicinity where liquor was sold, Mr. Bates drove a roaring trade, especially in the evenings, and on Sundays and holidays, consequently it was believed by those who knew him that he was well fixed financially.

As Mr. Bates was very fond of trotting across the bridge into Canada every once in a while, and as no one could fathom the object of these trips, a dark suspicion existed in the neighborhood that the tavern keeper was interested in sundry smuggling enterprises.

Strange men had been seen watching the roadhouse by the hour, drinking at the bar, and prowling around the river bank at night, and the impression prevailed that these strangers were revenue officers.

"I stopped to talk to Nellie Gray, uncle, and——" began Ralph Redwood, in reply to the questions snapped at him by Mr. Bates.

"Haven't I told you that I didn't want you to have anything more to do with that girl?" snorted the tavern keeper.

"I know you have, but I like Nellie. She's the nicest and prettiest girl hereabouts, and I don't see any sense in you objecting to our friendship."

"Don't you argue the matter with me. I won't have it. Her father has a bad reputation."

"A bad reputation!"

"Yes. Don't people say that he killed his wife?"

"Killed his wife! What do you mean?"

"Well, his intemperate habits drove her into the grave, so everybody says."

"People say lots of things that aren't true," replied the boy, helping himself to his supper, which was warming in the oven.

"What everybody says is generally true," persisted Mr. Bates. "At any rate, I know he's been drinking like a fish since his wife died."

"Yes, unfortunately that's true, and I feel dead sorry for Nellie."

"Bah! I hate maudlin sentiment. I won't have you associating with the daughter of a drunkard and a pauper."

"Well, who made him a drunkard?"

"Who? Himself, of course. Who else?"

"I've heard a good many people say that you're responsible for his condition."

"Me?"

"Yes. Where does he get the liquor that he drinks? Right in your tavern. You call him a pauper. Perhaps he is next door to one, yet he draws good wages in the foundry when he works. Where does that money go? Across your counter and into your till in exchange for the rum that is eating his vitals out, and fast bringing him to his grave. You are the last person, Uncle Obadiah, who should sneer at him and his unfortunate daughter, the dearest and best little girl in the world," said Ralph, with an indignant ring in his tones.

"How dare you talk to me in that way, you ungrateful monkey?" roared Obadiah Bates angrily. "Where would you have been to-day if it hadn't been for me? Didn't I take you in when you were thrown out on the world? Didn't I feed, clothe, and school you before you got old enough to be worth your salt? And didn't I get you the job you hold now in the Caxton Iron Foundry?"

"You did all those things, I admit, and ain't I repaying you now out of my wages?" replied Ralph.

"Repaying fiddlesticks! You're just paying your board."

"Don't I help you in your business when I have the chance, and haven't I done that for years?"

"Fudge!"

"I'm grateful to you for what you've done for me, but you don't seem to appreciate my efforts to square the account."

"You show your gratitude, don't you, by meeting Rufus Gray's daughter on every possible occasion, when you know I object to it," sneered Mr. Bates.

"Well, I'm about the only friend the girl has, and I intend to stick by her. It isn't her fault that her father is going down hill to a drunkard's grave. It isn't her fault that poverty is snapping at the heels of herself and her father like a hungry wolf. She has done all she could, and still is doing all she can, to induce her father to put on the brakes. There are times when he seems to realize that he is rushing toward the brink of destruction. Then he makes an effort to stem the tide that is sweeping him along. Unfortunately those periods of sobriety are short, and his unstable will soon yields to temptation. It is too bad."

"Humph! I suppose you've talked to him, too, about staying away from the tavern, and saving his money?" sneered Mr. Bates.

"I have, but my words have had little effect on him."

"You ought to know enough, then, to let him alone. What is he to you?"

"He's nothing to me; but when I see a man going to the dogs I feel that it is my duty to try and stop him."

"Very pretty, indeed! Some day, I dare say, you'll go on the stump as a temperance orator, with a cart load of statistics at your back to prove that every man who goes into a grog shop has started on the road to Old Nick."

"I might do worse, but I don't expect that my line of action will lead in that direction."

"Maybe you're ambitious to rise from your present job of foundry boy to that of a steel prince," grinned Mr. Bates.

"That's a long jump, but there is no saying what may not happen in this world. America is the land of opportunity."

"You don't want for nerve, at any rate."

"I believe Mr. Desmond, the proprietor of the Caxton Foundry, was once a poor boy. He is now rated as one of the richest men in Detroit."

"Yes; he was poor enough sixteen years ago," admitted the tavern keeper. "I remember when he was nothing but a bookkeeper."

"You do?" said Ralph, with a look of interest. "Then he worked himself up to his present position inside of sixteen years?"

"Worked nothing! Sixteen years ago he was as poor as a church mouse. Then all of a sudden he jumped from his desk in the counting-room to the private office of the establishment, and became boss of the foundry business."

"Why, how did that happen?"

"Just luck. He was a second cousin of John Sterling, the proprietor of the works. Sterling married a young wife, who died giving birth to a son. Three years later Sterling died, leaving everything to his son, making Desmond guardian of the boy. Desmond, of course, took charge of the business. Six months later there was an epidemic of scarlet fever in Detroit. The boy caught the disease and died. As next of kin Desmond came into the kid's fortune, and he's been growing richer ever since. So you see it was just luck that put him where he is."

"Oh!" ejaculated Ralph, rather disappointed.

"If you've finished your supper you can wash the dishes and tidy the place up, for Mrs. Benson"—that was the housekeeper—"won't be back till ten o'clock."

Thus speaking, Mr. Bates left the room to look after his business.

An hour later Ralph started to ascend the entry stairs back of the public room of the tavern to his room.

Hearing a rather heated exchange of words between two men, the tones of one of whom he recognized as Nellie Gray's father, he stopped, opened the door, and looked into the barroom.

The place was well filled with foundry workers and others, to whom Obadiah Bates was busy in his shirt sleeves serving drinks.

In the center of the room stood Rufus Gray, a man of powerful physique, with a good-looking but dissipated face, facing a short, bald-headed and crafty-looking individual named Simon Larue.

Larue was one of those cormorants who feed on the financial misfortunes of others.

He loaned small sums of money to people who were temporarily or otherwise strapped, provided they had a steady situation, without security other than a bond of their own making, the loan to be repaid in small weekly instalments.

He charged usurious rates, but kept within the law by deducting his interest and a premium from the sum advanced—the principle adopted by all money-lending sharks in his line of business.

Thus, if a customer borrowed \$25 of him, payable in twelve equal instalments by the week, he received only \$20.

If he defaulted in a payment he was charged an extra \$1, and Larue could enforce payment by legal proceedings.

Gray had been forced to borrow some money from him to meet the expenses of his wife's funeral.

At that time Nellie's father worked steadily.

He paid a portion of his debt, and then began to default.

The result was he now owed Larue more than he had originally borrowed.

The money lender was always after him for his pound of flesh, and Gray promised to settle, giving him a dollar on account occasionally, but didn't.

On this evening Larue followed him into the tavern and again demanded his debt.

Gray tried to pacify him as usual with promises.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the money lender angrily. "What is due is due."

"And who attempts to deny it?" replied Gray, in loud tones that attracted general attention to them.

"Then why don't you pay? I want my money."

"Give me a few days longer."

"That's the old story. You have defaulted so many times in your payments that you owe more than you borrowed. If you don't pay me something on account now you're no better than a swindler."

"What!" roared Gray. "You call me a swindler?"

"Yes, a swindler!"

"Why, you old rascal, I've a great mind to ram the lie down your skinny throat!"

He seized Larue and lifted him off his feet as if he were a baby.

"Help! Help! He means to murder me!" cried the money lender, in terror of his life, struggling in vain to extricate himself from the iron grip of Nellie's father.

Obadiah Bates at that moment was behind the bar, drawing several mugs of beer, and he didn't see what was going on.

Not a soul in the room moved to help Larue, for he was as unpopular as Rufus Gray was well liked.

Probably not a person present but at some time had come under the usurer's thumb, and they enjoyed his discomfiture.

"Help! Help! Obadiah Bates, help me!" screamed Larue as the angry foundryman shook him as a terrier does a rat.

Mr. Bates, for business reasons, was the only friend that the money lender had in the neighborhood, and he was the only one present who, for some unknown reason, hated Rufus Gray.

When he heard Larue's second call for help he straightened up and looked to see what was the matter.

When he saw the usurer in Gray's grip he slapped down the mugs of beer, seized a heavy bung starter and rushed at Nellie's father with the weapon uplifted.

He would assuredly have brained Gray, only for Ralph Redwood, who sprang into the room, dashed forward, seized the descending weapon, and prevented what might have been a tragedy.

CHAPTER II.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS.

Half the men in the room sprang to their feet when Mr. Bates rushed at Rufus Gray with the bung starter, but none was near enough to save the foundryman.

Ralph's interference, therefore, was greeted with general acclamation.

Gray recognized the boy as his preserver.

"Thanks, Ralph, my lad, I believe you saved my life,"

he said, releasing Larue, who slunk quickly behind the tavern keeper.

Bates was furious at his nephew's action.

"How dare you interfere, you young jackanapes?" he roared, glaring at the boy.

"I interfered to save you from committing a crime," replied Ralph.

"A crime! I only intended to give him a tap to make him let go of Simon Larue," replied the tavern keeper.

"A tap! Why, it took all my strength to stop the sweep of the bung starter," replied Ralph. "I guess you don't know how hard you struck out."

"Who would think such a skinny man had so much muscle?" laughed Gray, gazing with contempt at Obadiah Bates. "That's a scurvy way to treat a customer who has spent so much money over your bar as I have."

"Yes, yes; you spend your money for drink, instead of paying your honest debts, you drunken loafer!" cried Simon Larue.

"I'm a drunken loafer, am I, you infernal Shylock!" cried Gray furiously, making a spring for the money lender.

"Keep him away!" screamed Larue, as Ralph grabbed the infuriated foundryman and prevented him from reaching the usurer, but only with great difficulty and the exercise of all his strength. "So this is the way you pay your debts, Rufus Gray. Well, well, we shall see—we shall see! Wait till to-morrow, and I will have you up before a magistrate, and you shall be sent to jail if it costs me a thousand dollars! You attacked me, and tried to kill me, and every man here shall be a witness against you. I'll fix you, you drunken bum!"

"And I'll fix you for the names you have called me, you insignificant whelp! But first I'll pay you every dollar I owe you, and then I'll break every bone in your body! So I'm a drunken loafer and bum! I've sunk to that, have I?" his tone and manner changing to utter dejection. "Well, no man shall call me that again. From this moment I swear not another drop of liquor shall pass my lips, so help me Heaven!"

"That's right, Mr. Gray, stick to that, for your daughter Nellie's sake," said Ralph earnestly, laying his hand on the foundryman's arm.

"I will, my lad, for Nellie's sake. And I sha'n't forget what I owe you for your interference in my favor. You saved me from a cracked skull, and your uncle ought to be as grateful to you as I am, for had he laid me out he might have swung for it."

"Bah! You talk like a fool. You'd better go home, for I don't want you around here till you settle the score I have against you."

"I'll settle it, never fear, and it will be the last money you'll ever get from me—the last, do you understand?"

"Yes, I've heard you say that before," sneered the tavern keeper. "You pay up what's on the slate, then you can drink here again. Till you do, you had better not come around."

Rufus Gray threw a scathing look at him, and then walked toward the doorway.

"Here, hold on, Gray! What's your hurry?" asked one of the men present. "If the house won't stand for you every man here will. Call for what you want, and I'll pay for it to begin with."

"No, I've quit, boys," replied Gray. "I shall cut the lush out for good. To-night I've been called a drunken bum and loafer. I, Rufus Gray, who once could hold my head up before all men. It's cut me to the quick. It has made me see as nothing else has, to what a level I have fallen," he said, with a sob in his voice. "Hereafter I will try to be a man again, and, Heaven help me, I will. Good-night."

His words and manner impressed the men for the moment, and not a hand sought to detain him; but after he had vanished into the night the men began to laugh at Gray's seeming reformation, and bets were freely made as to the length of time he would hold out.

"Well, I must be getting home, Bates," said Larue. "I expect a visitor at my house in an hour."

"Better wait a while longer. You might run foul of that drunken foundryman, and, judging from the way he handled you a while ago, and the threat he made against you, it would be likely to go hard with you if you two came together," said the tavern keeper.

"Perhaps you're right, Obadiah. I've no wish to meet him alone and in the dark on my way home," replied the usurer. "But I'll fix him to-morrow. You know the names of these men here to-night. Put them down on a piece of paper for me. I mean to summon them as witnesses with you and your nephew. I'll see if I can't take my debt out of him in another way. By assaulting me he has put himself in my power, and I'll use my advantage to the full extent of the law."

Ralph heard the money lender's words, and he realized that Nellie's father was likely to pay dear for the shaking he had given Simon Larue.

"It's a shame," he muttered, "for that old Shylock deserved all he got. But there isn't any doubt that he can make things hot for Mr. Gray. If I only knew of some way to save him. The only thing I can do is to go over to his house and warn him. By stepping across the river he will be safe from arrest. Perhaps then matters can be arranged to square him with Larue by paying him his account in full. I am sure the men will chip in a pot to get him out of his hole, for they all like him. I don't know that he has an enemy in the world aside from my uncle, and why he is down on him so hard, after all the money the man has spent in the house, is more than I can figure out."

So, intent on warning the father of Nellie Gray, and inducing him to cross the railroad bridge into the town of Windsor, Ralph left the room, and the house, by the back way.

While Bates was waiting on his customers, Simon Larue stood at the end of the bar, studying a note he had taken from his pocket.

"He is rich, very rich, but how long will he stand for my little touches?" he muttered, gazing intently at the letter. "They say that even a worm will turn in time, perhaps he might—pshaw! What can he do? I hold the whip hand of him. The proofs I have in my possession if brought to light would ruin him. I can put my hand on the heir at any moment I choose. And to think that my good friend Obadiah hasn't the faintest suspicion that—well, no matter," he chuckled. "But I wonder why he is coming to my house to-night with the money instead of sending his check, as he has done before? Is he up to some mischief? I live

alone, and he knows it. I wish I could induce Obadiah to go over with me and stay until my visitor has gone away. I have nobody else I could call on, for I haven't any friends. No friends, he, he, he! Yet I have lots of friends when they are in need of money, he, he! I'm afraid Obadiah can't leave his business. Maybe his nephew—his nephew, he, he!—would answer as well. I'll ask Obadiah to let him come with me."

When Bates joined him a moment later he made his request.

"Certainly, Simon, he shall go with you. I'll call him."

Ralph, however, didn't answer his call, and going up to the lad's room, he found he was not there.

"The young jackanapes has gone out," he thought. "I wonder where he has taken himself off to? Well, Simon will have to get along without him."

He returned and told the money lender that his nephew had gone out, he didn't know where.

"Well, no matter," replied Larue. "I guess I can do without him."

He started to go, and got as far as the door, and then came back.

"You did me a good turn to-night, Obadiah, and I sha'n't forget it," he said. "I wish to do something for you one of these days in case——"

"What is it?" asked the tavern keeper curiously, as the usurer paused and looked at him.

"I wish to make you a present."

"A present!"

"Yes—after I am dead."

"Thank you, Simon, I shall have some time to wait," grinned Mr. Bates, "for you bid fair for a long life."

"Perhaps, but I am growing old."

"So am I," chuckled the tavern keeper.

"Nobody knows who is to live, or who to die," went on the money lender.

"Pooh! You'll live to be a hundred, I'll bet."

"I haven't the slightest objection," replied Larue with a chuckle. "But, for all that, if one day you should hear that I have slipped through, as the custom house officers say of you——"

"My intimate enemies," grinned Mr. Bates. "I'll bet there's one of them now down by the river on the watch."

"Well," in a lower tone, "go then to my house——"

"Your house!"

"Yes. Enter the garden, and at the foot of the old elm—you know the old elm?"

"That old hollow tree under which we have often smoked our pipes together? I should think so."

"Well, there, by just removing a little of the earth, you will find something that will be useful to you."

"Something——" said the tavern keeper eagerly.

"Oh, don't get excited. It isn't money."

"Huh!" said Mr. Bates, disappointed.

"But, remember, that something can be of no use to you till I am dead."

"Very well—that is understood, Simon; I shall not forget. And now that I am your heir," with a grin, "if you are at all tired of your life, don't stand on ceremony. I'll see that you're planted in good shape."

"I shall die only when I can't help it—not before, Obadiah, not before."

"Hum! I suppose not."

"That's all I've got to say, except——"

"What?"

"Good-night."

"Good-night, Simon. Take care of yourself," said Mr. Bates, accompanying him to the door.

The tavern keeper watched him disappear in the darkness.

"I wonder what's in the wind?" he muttered. "I never heard Simon talk this way before. Is he afraid something might happen to him? Maybe he's thinking of Rufus Gray's threat. Well, I wouldn't like to have a half-drunken brute like him down on me. He's as strong as an ox. If he met Simon to-night there's no saying what might happen. Hum, hum! I wonder what's at the roots of that hollow tree in Simon's yard? He said it was something that might be useful to me, but only after he is dead. I wish I knew what it was."

Two or three of his customers shouting to be waited on brought him back to earth, and he hastened to attend to them.

CHAPTER III.

SIMON LARUE'S FATE.

In the meantime Ralph walked straight over to Rufus Gray's cottage.

There was a light in the sitting-room window.

Ralph looked in and saw Nellie sewing beside a table on which stood a lamp.

There was no one else in the room, so the boy judged that the foundryman had not yet returned home.

He tapped on the window.

The girl looked up and listened.

Ralph tapped again, a little louder.

Nellie got up, and, going to the window, looked out.

She recognized the foundry boy's face looking in at her, and eagerly raised the window.

"Why, is that you, Ralph?" she said in a glad tone.

"Looks like me, doesn't it, Nellie?"

"This is quite a surprise to see you so soon again."

"A pleasant one, I hope."

"Can you doubt it?"

"No, I guess you're always as glad to see me as I am to see you. Your father isn't in?"

"No. He went out after supper, and I fear he has gone over to your uncle's tavern to put in the evening," she replied in a sad voice.

"He was there, but left a short time ago, and I supposed he came straight home."

"He hasn't come home yet. Was he—was he——"

"Under the influence of liquor? Not much, if any."

"He makes me so unhappy. If he only would stop drinking for good, what a blessing it would be."

"Well, he's quit for the present, at any rate, and I hope for good. He swore he wouldn't touch another drop from this night."

"He did!" she exclaimed, her tear-dimmed eyes lighting up.

"I'll tell you how it came about. That old Shylock, Simon Larue, came into the tavern and dunned him for the debt he owes him. They had some hot words over it, and Larue called your father a swindler. That made him mad,

and he grabbed the money lender and gave him a rough shaking up. Larue, when he got away from him, called him a drunken loafer and a bum. I believe your father would have killed him had he been able to get hold of him. The words, however, had a strange effect on him after he cooled down a bit. He seemed to realize that he was on the road to ruin—that he must have sunk pretty low to be called such names. So he up and swore that he wouldn't touch another drop from that moment, and it strikes me he will keep his word."

"Oh, if he only would!" said Nellie, clasping her hands.

"But I didn't come over here just to tell you that, though I'm sure it will make you feel happy. I came over to warn your father."

"Warn him! What do you mean?" a frightened look coming into the girl's eyes.

"To get out of town and cross over to Windsor for a week or so."

"Why should he?"

"To save him from getting into trouble."

"Oh, Ralph, you frighten me! What trouble is my father likely to get in?"

"Well, you see Larue is mad over the shaking up your father gave him, and he swore he would get a warrant out for him in the morning and prosecute him for assault."

"And my father will be arrested?"

"I'm afraid he will if he stays in town. All he need do is to cross over to Windsor, and then he'll be safe. In the meantime I'll have a talk with the men in the foundry, and we'll try and square the matter by making a collection and paying Simon Larue what your father owes him with the understanding that he will drop the charge of assault."

"Oh, dear, this is terrible!"

"It is awkward, but I dare say matters can be fixed in a few days so that your father can come back and go to work again."

"I hope so."

"When he comes home you must tell him what Larue is going to do to-morrow, and insist that he cross over to Canada right after breakfast and stay there till he is told he can come back with safety. He must send you word by mail where he can be found in Windsor. Then when things have been fixed I'll go over and fetch him back."

"I'll tell him, Ralph. You are very kind to come over to warn him."

"Nellie, you know I would do anything for you, and in helping your father out of a bad fix I am serving you, too."

"Oh, Ralph, you seem to be a true friend to us, and Heaven knows we need one."

"That's all right. They say a friend in need is a friend indeed. At any rate, I believe in giving people who are down a helping hand, and particularly you, for whom I feel a sisterly regard."

The girl blushed a little and held out her hand to the boy.

"I hope we shall always be good friends," she said earnestly.

"It won't be my fault if we aren't. And now good-night. I will meet you at the factory to-morrow afternoon when it shuts down. Or, if I can't, I'll call here after supper. Good-night."

"Good-night, Ralph."

He walked away, and she, shutting the window, returned

to her chair, not to work, however, but to think of her father and listen for his return.

On his way back to the tavern Ralph would have to pass by the house in which Simon Larue lived.

It stood back from the road a bit, and occupied the center of a good-sized plot of ground.

Ralph knew the house, for he had carried messages there for Mr. Bates on several occasions.

It was an old building, and larger than any of the cottages in the vicinity.

"I guess the old Shylock must be home, for I see there's a light burning in the room he uses for his office. I pity the man who is compelled to borrow money from him. It's 'Walk into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly. I'll bet he is mighty well fixed; but I don't see what good wealth is to an old rascal like him, who lives like a hermit, all by himself, and hoards up his bank notes for somebody else to blow in after he's dead and buried."

As Ralph spoke the dull report of a revolver came from the direction of the house.

"Good gracious! What was that? It sounded like a shot!"

Ralph stopped, leaned on the fence, and looked toward the house.

In a few moments the front door was flung open and a man issued hastily from the building.

He was a person of stalwart physique, muffled to the eyes in an overcoat, with a slouch hat pulled down over his forehead.

As he passed through the gate his coat caught in the latch, but with an impatient jerk and a muttered exclamation, which the boy heard, he pulled it loose and hurried away in the direction of town.

Before Ralph recovered from his surprise he was out of sight in the darkness.

"Something is wrong, I'm afraid," said Ralph to himself. "I wonder what has happened? Looks as if——"

At that moment the side window of Simon Larue's office was slowly pushed up, and the old usurer's head appeared in the opening.

"Help! Help! For the love of Heaven! Help! I'm murdered!" he cried out.

That cry galvanized Ralph into instant action.

"Good Lord! The old man was shot, I'll bet a hat!" he cried, as he started for the gate.

Out of the darkness came another figure from the opposite direction.

He was a short, dark-complexioned, wiry man of about forty.

Both he and the boy reached the gate at the same instant.

"Help! Help! I'm dying! I'm dy——" rang out Larue's voice.

"Seems to be trouble in that house," said the wiry man in a sharp tone.

"I'm afraid old Simon Larue has been shot," replied Ralph.

"Eh! What makes you think that?" asked the man, looking at him keenly as they passed through the gate and hurried to the house.

"I heard a shot as I was coming along. It came from his office. Then a big man, muffled in an overcoat, with a

slouch hat over his forehead, came rushing out at the front door, and walked off in the direction you came," replied the boy.

"I saw a man answering that description turn in at one of the cottages down the block, but I paid no attention to him, supposing he lived there. So this is the money lender's house, eh? I've heard of him. They say he's an old screw. Somebody who owed him money may have shot him in a quarrel. We will see in a moment."

The wiry man showed no backwardness in pushing open the front door and entering the house, closely followed by Ralph.

"His office is on this side of the corridor," said the boy, pointing to a door that stood slightly ajar, and through which a dim light shone.

"You seem to know the house pretty well."

"I ought to, for I've been here several times on errands from my uncle."

"Your uncle!"

"Yes, Mr. Bates."

"The tavern keeper?" asked the wiry man, looking hard at Ralph.

"Yes."

He said nothing more, but entered the usurer's office.

It was a shabbily furnished apartment, with an open desk in one corner, a table in the center, several straight-back chairs, and a few old-fashioned pictures on the walls.

The floor was covered with a threadbare carpet, that was particularly worn between the door and the desk, on the top of which stood a lamp, burning brightly.

A revolver lay on the floor between the table and the desk.

The wiry man picked it up and looked at it.

"One chamber discharged," he said, dropping it in his pocket in a matter-of-fact way. "Now, where is Simon Larue?"

"Yonder, by the window," replied Ralph, pointing to where the money lender lay huddled up, an inert figure, under the raised sash.

The wiry man rushed over to him and raised his head.

"Bring the lamp, my lad," he said in a tone of command. Ralph obeyed.

The old man looked like a corpse.

His face was white and drawn, his eyes and mouth slightly apart.

His left hand, which was covered with blood, was clutched against his left breast.

"I'm afraid he's turned in his check," said the wiry man. "Shot over the heart, I see."

He pulled out a flask of spirits, pried the usurer's mouth open, and poured some of it down his throat, while holding his head across his knee.

In a moment or two the money lender opened his eyes and stared wildly into the face of the wiry man.

"Who shot you?" asked the stranger.

Simon tried to speak, but blood welled up to his lips and prevented him.

He made a desperate effort to get a word or more out, but the attempt was a failure.

It was his last action on earth.

With a groan of despair he fell back and expired.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE MURDER.

"He's dead, and the name of his assassin was on his lips, but he couldn't utter it," said the wiry man. "Well, it can't be helped. Now for a clue that will put justice on the murderer's track. This revolver is no doubt his property, and he dropped it after committing the crime. Hold the light lower, boy."

He started to examine the weapon.

"That's Simon Larue's revolver," said Ralph, recognizing it.

"How do you know that?"

"I've seen it on his desk more than once."

"Are you positive it is the same weapon you saw on the desk?"

"Yes."

"How do you identify it?"

"By its general likeness and that double scratch."

"Give me the lamp," said the wiry man, slipping the gun back in his pocket.

He went over to the desk and picked up a paper that lay there.

It was Rufus Gray's note of hand for the original sum borrowed.

On the back were a list of payments made on account.

Pinned to it was the bond and a paper covered with figures in pencil that had been made by the usurer, showing the additional sums he had charged against Gray for many defaults in payment.

Gray had borrowed \$50, of which amount he had received but \$40, the \$10 having been deducted for interest and premium charges. He had paid \$20 in small amounts. That left \$30 nominally due. To that sum Larue had added \$21 for defaults and sundry alleged expenses connected therewith, so that the foundryman now actually was indebted to him in the sum of \$51.

The wiry man scanned the papers carefully.

"Do you know a man named Rufus Gray?" he asked Ralph.

"I do. What about him?"

"Does he answer the description of the man you told me you saw coming from this house after the shot was fired?"

"In general build, yes, but otherwise no," replied Ralph, in a hesitating tone, for he scented trouble in the man's question. "By the way, who are you, and why did you ask me that question?"

"Don't be inquisitive, boy," replied the man sharply. "That reminds me you haven't told me your name."

"What of it?" replied Ralph aggressively.

"I want to know it."

There was that in his tone and manner that compelled the boy to answer.

"Ralph Redwood."

"And Obadiah Bates, the tavern keeper, is your uncle?"

"He is."

"Do you live with him?"

"I do."

"I have never——"

He paused abruptly and added:

"You work, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Caxton Foundry."

"What do you know about Rufus Gray?"

"I know he's an honest, square man," replied Ralph sturdily.

The wiry man regarded him with sharp attention for a moment.

"What does he do for a living?"

"He's a puddler in the foundry."

"Wages good, eh?"

"Yes."

"Family large, eh? Had trouble lately?"

"He has only one daughter. His wife died four months ago, and——"

"Well, why don't you go on?" as the boy stopped.

"Because what I was about to say is none of your business."

"Humph!"

"I don't see why you're so inquisitive about him, anyway. Do you think that he killed Simon Larue? If you do I can tell you that you're clear off."

"Humph!"

"He isn't that kind of a man. The only trouble with him is he——"

"Well?"

"Nothing," replied Ralph doggedly.

"Humph!"

The man put the documents in his pocket as coolly as if they belonged to him, whereupon Ralph interfered.

"Here, hold on! You've no right to take anything away that belonged to Simon Larue. Put those papers back, and that revolver, too. I'm going to lock up the house and tell my uncle what has happened. He'll notify the police, and then they'll take charge of the house."

"Look here, son," said the man, pulling back his coat; "see that?"

Ralph looked and saw that the man wore the badge of the detective service.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "You are an officer?"

"Instead of going to the tavern, where I suppose you are bound, go into town and at the first telephone station you strike ring up the police and explain what has happened. Can I depend on you to do that at once?"

"Yes," replied Ralph, who felt that the request was equivalent to a command.

"Very good. Here's a quarter. Pay the toll and keep the change," replied the detective, leading him to the door. "I shall remain here."

Ralph hurried away to execute his mission.

As he opened the gate he noticed something fluttering from the latch.

Looking at it closely he saw it was a piece of plaid lining torn from a coat.

He remembered that the man who had issued from the house after the shot was fired had been caught for a moment in the gate.

"This may prove a clue to the murderer," thought the boy, detaching it and putting it in his pocket.

Then he continued on into the outskirts of the city.

He knew there was a drug store not far from the foundry that was a pay station of the telephone.

He went directly to it, called up the nearest police station, and detailed the murder of Simon Larue, concluding by stating that he had left a detective in charge of the house.

Retracing his steps, he came to Rufus Gray's cottage again.

It was now close on to eleven o'clock.

He noticed that the light was still burning in the sitting-room.

He supposed that the foundryman was sitting up smoking, as was his custom when at home.

He thought he'd stop and tell him about the murder of Simon Larue, and say that there was no further need of his migrating across the river in the morning, as the death of the usurer removed all danger of his arrest for assault.

So he stepped up to the window and looked in.

He was surprised to see Nellie sitting in her chair as before, alone, and her head bent forward as if she had fallen asleep.

"Looks as if her father has not got home yet. I wonder where he has been keeping himself since he left the tavern, more than two hours ago? He may have stopped in at the house of some friend, but he ought to be home by this time."

He waited around the cottage for a good ten minutes, thinking Gray would show up, but he didn't.

"I'll have to wake Nellie, tell her the news, and let her know it will not be necessary now for her father to go to Windsor."

He went to the window and rapped smartly.

The girl awoke with a start and looked around in the dazed manner of people suddenly aroused from sleep.

Ralph rapped again, calling out, "Nellie!"

The girl seemed to recognize his voice, for she ran to the window and opened it.

"Is that you, Ralph?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"It's nobody else. Your father hasn't got home yet, I believe?"

"No. I'm feeling anxious about him."

"Well, I've got news for you."

"Nothing bad, is it?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, it's bad, but not for you or your father. In fact, you needn't tell him to cross the river now. The necessity is removed."

"It is? Has the trouble been settled?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By death."

"Death!" she exclaimed, greatly startled.

"Yes. Simon Larue is dead—murdered in his house fifteen minutes after I left you to go home."

"Who killed him?"

"That's more than I can tell you. I guess the assassin is the only person who could answer that question at this moment. I'll tell you the particulars as far as I know them."

Accordingly he explained all the facts of the case as the reader knows them.

"Now your father can go to work in the morning just as if nothing had occurred between him and the dead money lender," concluded Ralph.

"I'm so glad of that," she replied; "but I do wish he'd come home. It is after eleven now."

"Oh, he'll be along presently," said the boy in a confident tone that seemed to reassure Nellie. "Now I'm off again. Good-night."

The light was burning in the dead usurer's office when Ralph approached his house for the second time that evening.

He debated whether to go in and see the detective, but finally concluded not to do so.

Continuing on home, he found Mr. Bates just putting up the shutters.

The barroom was empty, and Obadiah was closing up for the night.

"Seems to me you've made a long stay of it, young man," he said to Ralph in a crusty tone. "Where have you been till this hour?"

"Several places. At Simon Larue's house for one," replied the boy.

"Oh, I suppose that accounts for your delay in getting back," replied the tavern keeper, somewhat mollified.

"To tell the truth, it does."

"Put up the other shutter, and then you can go to bed."

"I will, but first I've got news for you."

"News, eh? What is it?"

"Simon Larue has been murdered."

"What!" gasped Mr. Bates, staring aghast at his nephew. "Simon mur——"

"Yes, he was shot in his office."

"When, and by whom?"

"About half-past nine, I should think. I couldn't tell you who shot him."

The news certainly paralyzed Obadiah Bates.

He could hardly believe it.

He questioned Ralph closely, and learned all about the appearance of the detective.

He appeared to be eager to get a personal description of this man, which Ralph gave him to the best of his recollection.

The boy took advantage of his abstraction to put up the other shutter.

Then he entered the barroom and crossed toward the entry door to go to his room.

At the end of the bar he saw an envelope lying on the floor which looked as if it had been walked over a number of times.

He picked it up.

It was addressed to Simon Larue at his house, and, from the stamp and postmark, had evidently reached him through the mail.

Ralph put it in his pocket, intending to hand it to his uncle later on.

When he reached his room he took out the piece of coat lining he had taken from the gate and examined it by the light of his lamp.

He saw that the letters "C. D." were embroidered on it.

"Those must be the initials of Simon Larue's murderer," he thought. "I shall have to turn this over to the police in the morning," folding it up and putting it in his pocket.

As he took off his jacket the letter he had picked up in the barroom dropped out on the carpet.

He picked it up and looked at it again.

"This was posted this afternoon. I wonder if it has any connection with the murder? I hardly think so."

His curiosity, however, wouldn't let him rest till he pulled out the enclosure and looked at it.

This is what he read:

"SIMON LARUE: Instead of honoring your latest demand with my check, as usual, I will call on you this evening with the money. I wish to see if we cannot come to a final settlement. Perhaps a lump sum would satisfy you and relieve me of any further requisitions on your part.

"Yours, C. D."

Ralph was rather astonished at the contents of the note.

C. D. was evidently somebody who Simon Larue had under his thumb, judging from the terms of the note.

Not a common debtor, apparently, but a man who had a bank account, since he mentioned having met previous demands by check.

According to the tenor of the note, he was willing to pay a lump sum (amount not indicated) for a final settlement with the usurer.

"C. D. evidently called on Simon Larue at the hour stated, failed to arrange a satisfactory settlement, and then shot the old man," muttered Ralph. "Clearly it must have been a heavy hold that Larue had on this C. D. that would bring the latter to a murderous frame of mind. He doubtless had no thought of committing the crime when he wrote this letter, or he wouldn't have furnished this clue which may lead to the ultimate disclosure of his identity."

Ralph put the piece of lining inside the envelope, intending to hand both to the police in the morning, and then went to bed; but it was a long time before he got to sleep, for his mind was much exercised over the identity of C. D.

CHAPTER V.

RALPH'S NARROW ESCAPE.

Ralph was aroused as usual next morning by Mrs. Benson hammering on his chamber door.

"All right, Mrs. Benson," he said, springing out of bed and hurrying on his clothes.

His uncle was not in sight when he entered the living-room and sat down to his breakfast.

"Isn't Mr. Bates up yet?" he asked the housekeeper.

"I haven't seen him," replied the woman.

When Ralph left the house he intended to stop at Simon Larue's house and leave the envelope containing the two clues with the police, whom he expected to find in charge of the place.

As he approached the residence of the dead money lender he put his hand in his pocket to take out the envelope so as to have it ready.

He remembered putting it in his inside pocket, but now, to his surprise, he didn't find it there.

He searched all his pockets, but in vain.

"I must have thought I put it in my pocket and dropped it on the floor instead. Mrs. Benson will find it and either leave it on my dresser or turn it over to Mr. Bates. At any rate, I'll learn what became of it when I get home to-night. No use now for me to stop at the house. I'll take it over to the police to-night—that is, if Mr. Bates hasn't done that himself in the meantime."

So Ralph went on to the foundry, got into his overalls and prepared for his day's work.

He looked around for Rufus Gray, and not seeing him, asked one of the hands if he had come to work that morning.

"Haven't seen him," was the reply.

The morning passed away and the noon hour arrived.

Ralph was kept busy at his usual duties in the foundry.

The establishment was turning out steel girders for the railroad bridge, which were intended to replace certain defective ones that had yielded to the strain put upon the structure after the passage of heavy trains for a number of years.

Ralph was employed in the machine room of the bridge department.

While all hands were at lunch the foreman of the room came up to the boy.

"Report to McIntosh at the bridge after lunch," he said to Ralph.

"All right, sir," answered the foundry boy respectfully.

When the whistle blew for the resumption of work Ralph started for the bridge.

At the next corner he boarded a trolley car which landed him close to his destination.

A dozen men were employed near the pier support on the Canadian side of the river, perhaps two hundred yards from the shore.

Thither Ralph made his way, and singling out McIntosh, reported his arrival.

The foreman on the bridge had already been informed by telephone that he was coming, and was looking for him.

He was put to work with a riveting gang employed on a girder that had just been put in place.

It was a new sensation for Ralph to work away up in the air, over the swiftly flowing Detroit River or strait which connected Lake St. Clair with Lake Erie, and divided the lower section of Ontario from the State of Michigan.

It took a whole lot of nerve to labor under such conditions, but Ralph was a nifty lad, and didn't mind his ticklish position a bit.

In fact, he rather enjoyed it.

This was not the first time he had worked on a bridge, though never before at quite such a height.

It was a fine afternoon, the breeze was light and refreshing on the bridge, and the water sparkled in the sunshine.

Tugs and lighters and small craft of various build passed up and down the stream beneath him, while ferry boats plied between Windsor and Detroit.

It was close on to five o'clock, and the final girder for the day was about to be lifted and placed in position.

The hoisting tackle was attached to the center of it, and then Ralph was ordered to get astride of one end of it, while another worker was placed on the opposite end.

It was the duty of these two to see that the girder was dropped carefully and exactly into the duplicate slots ready to receive the two ends.

All being ready, the two riders gripping the ends with their hands and legs, the order was given to hoist away.

The wire cable began to move through the steel blocks, and the girder rose slowly into the air.

At the same time the apparatus that was to swing the beam into place began shoving it outward in a slight semi-circle.

It was an odd and creepy sensation that came upon Ralph as he felt himself swinging out over the river and away from the bridge, though not far.

Still he knew he could not fall as long as he clung on even with his feet alone, for the girder remained practically on the level, so nicely balanced was it.

He was really as safe as though only a few feet from the ground, provided, of course, that he did not grow dizzy and lose his nerve.

He refrained from looking down at the water, keeping his eyes on the bridge and the other workers.

Suddenly and without the slightest warning a loud snap attracted the attention of all the workers.

What happened followed as quick as lightning.

As the hoisting cable broke the steel beam fell, knocking Ralph from the bridge.

Down he plunged toward the river, and the startled men uttered a yell of alarm.

Death stared the boy in the face during that terrible fall.

The girder, though it tilted outward for an instant, fortunately did not follow him, but rested, in a dangerous position, across two other girders.

Work ceased at once, and the eyes of foreman and workmen were bent upon the river in expectation of seeing the boy come into sight.

The accident happened so quickly that Ralph was shooting downward through the air before he had any idea what had happened.

His flight was so brief and rapid that he hardly had time to think of his terrible position before he hit the water and went under.

Fortunately, he struck the river like a diver, with his hands extended above his head, for he had mechanically thrown them out to grasp at something in the air.

He was a good swimmer, but nevertheless he was dazed by the shock, and when he came to the surface was in no shape to help himself.

Luckily for him, aid was close at hand.

A rowboat, with two men in it, which had put out from the Canadian shore just before he fell, was within a yard or two of him when his head rose above the surface of the river.

"There he is," said one of the men. "A good pull and I'll have him."

His companion gave a strong pull at the oars, and the other, reaching over the gunwale, seized Ralph by the collar of his shirt and pulled him half out of the water.

His companion, dropping his oars, gave him a hand, and between them they soon landed the boy in the boat.

Ralph, unable to utter a word, stared at them and gasped.

"Why, it's Obadiah Bates' nevvv!" said the chap who first caught hold of the boy.

"So it is," replied the other. "I thought he was workin' in the foundry."

"Well, it's the foundry that's repairin' the bridge. That was a whoppin' header he took, Sam. It's a wonder he ever came up."

"What'll we do with him?"

"Why, take him home, of course. I guess he don't need no doctor. He'll be as right as a trivet before we get to the tavern stairs."

"How d'ye feel, sonny?" asked his companion, peering into Ralph's face.

"I—don't—know," fluttered the foundry boy.

"Give him a chance to come around, Sam. D'ye s'pose he can answer you all at once?" said the other man. "Take hold of your oars and get busy. I'll look after him."

The man called Sam, whose other name was Cooke, grabbed the oars and began to row down the stream with the tide, heading across for the Michigan shore.

His companion pulled a flask of prime French cognac from his hip pocket, and, unscrewing the stopper, put it to Ralph's lips and told him to take a drink.

The boy did so, and the strong spirits revived him greatly.

"Thank you," he said. "I feel much better. I guess you chaps saved my life, and I'm much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it, sonny; you're welcome. How came you to fall off the bridge?"

Ralph said he hardly knew himself, but he guessed the hoisting tackle broke.

"Where are you taking me to?" he asked, looking around, after making his explanation.

"Across the river, where you belong."

"If it isn't too much trouble I'd be glad if you'd land me at the stairs behind Obadiah Bates' tavern on the suburbs of Detroit. I'll show you where it is."

"We know the place, sonny, and we'll land you there."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"You needn't be. We were bound in that direction, anyway. Have another swig of brandy. It'll keep you from catchin' cold."

"Thank you, I will. It braces a fellow up. This is the first time I ever tasted liquor, and I hope I won't need to do it again soon."

"The first time, eh? And your uncle keeps a tavern," said the man with a grin.

"How did you know that Mr. Bates is my uncle?"

"Oh, I kind of guessed it, sonny," replied the man evasively.

"You're a good guesser, then," smiled Ralph.

"It's part of my business to be a good guesser," chuckled the other.

"Maybe you can guess my name?" said the boy.

"One good guess is enough for the present," replied the man with a knowing wink. "You'd better tell me."

"My name is Ralph Redwood. What is yours and your companion's?"

"Oh, I'm called Martin Roseberry, and my friend here is Sam Cooke."

"Glad to know you both, and if I ever have a chance to return the favor you have done for me I'll be pleased to do it," said Ralph.

"You don't want to be too rash makin' promises, sonny. Somethin' might turn up so that we might have to hold you to your word."

"If it ever does I'll stand by what I said."

"Well and good, sonny; we'll take your word for it. You had quite a murder in your town last night."

"Do you mean Simon Larue's?"

"That's the one. The papers say one of the foundry hands shot him."

"One of the foundry hands!" cried Ralph in surprise.

"Yes; a man named Rufus Gray."

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say that he's accused of shooting Larue?" cried Ralph, greatly startled.

"The police say he's the murderer, and they're lookin' for him."

"Looking for him?"

"Here's the afternoon 'News.' You can read the story for yourself. Detectives have been watchin' his house since midnight, and he ain't showed up, accordin' to last accounts. They think he skipped across to Ontario, and they've asked the Windsor police to look for him."

"Why, he isn't the guilty man!"

"How do you know he isn't, sonny?"

"I know he isn't. He wouldn't do such a thing to begin with, and secondly his initials aren't C. D."

"What has C. D. got to do with it?"

It suddenly occurred to Ralph that he was saying too much.

"Nothing, I guess," replied the boy in an embarrassed way.

"The paper says that Rufus Gray owed the dead man money and couldn't pay it. It also says that the two had a row over the debt in Obadiah Bates' tavern an hour before the tragedy, and that Gray threatened to get square with the money lender."

"I'll admit they had a scrap, for I was present when it happened. That doesn't prove that Rufus Gray killed the usurer."

"No, but the threat, and the fact that he's skipped out somewhere, goes a long way toward fastenin' suspicion on him," said Roseberry.

"I don't see why he should have skipped, nor where he is gone."

"He knows best himself. At any rate, I wouldn't care to be in his shoes."

A moment more and the rowboat shot alongside the stairs leading up to a small porch at the back of the tavern.

"Here you are, son. Step ashore, and we'll be off," said Roseberry hastily, as a short, stout man, who had been sunning himself on the bank, got up and came forward.

Ralph thanked both men again, and stepping on to the landing stage at the foot of the stairs, started to ascend to the porch.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BATES EXPRESSES HIS SENTIMENTS.

"Hold on, young man," said the short, stout stranger, coming up. "Did you come across the river?"

"No, I came out of the river. Don't I look like it?" laughed Ralph.

The stranger, who was connected with the custom house, had to admit that he did.

However, he ran his hands up and down the boy's trousers in a professional way, and then asked him if he had fallen overboard, and how.

Ralph gave him an explanation of the accident he had met with on the bridge, and the stranger, apparently satisfied, walked away.

"For mercy sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Benson, the house-keeper, as Ralph entered the kitchen, where she was beginning preparations for supper. "What brings you home

so early? And what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd been in the water."

"That's just where I've been, Mrs. Benson. I was working on the railroad bridge this afternoon. I was astride of a steel girder they were hoisting into place. Suddenly something gave way—the hoisting tackle, I guess—and the next thing I knew I was flying through the air toward the river."

"My goodness! It's a mercy you weren't drowned."

"Only the good die young, Mrs. Benson," laughed Ralph, as he proceeded on to his room, where he changed his damp garments for dry ones.

Then it was that he noticed the evening paper that Roseberry had given him.

That recalled to his mind what the man had said about Rufus Gray being suspected of the murder of Simon Larue.

"Why, it's ridiculous! At any rate, I know he isn't guilty. C. D. is the man who committed the murder, for I have proof that—now that reminds me of the letter that must have dropped out of my pocket last night. I must look it up right away."

He looked over his dresser to see if it was there, but it wasn't.

He examined the upper drawer, thinking, if Mrs. Benson had picked it up, as she naturally would, if she saw it lying on the floor, she would put it somewhere that he would be likely to find it.

It wasn't in the drawer, nor, in fact, anywhere about the room.

"I'll run down and ask Mrs. Benson about it," he said to himself.

So he went to the kitchen and questioned her about the letter.

She declared that she hadn't found any envelope on the floor that morning.

"Where in creation could it have gone to?" Ralph asked himself.

That was a conundrum he couldn't discover a solution to, so he had to give it up for the time being.

As supper wasn't ready, he went into the barroom, where he found his uncle reading the evening paper.

"Well, what do you think of your friend Rufus Gray now?" Mr. Bates remarked, favoring Ralph with a grin of satisfaction. "A murderer and fugitive from justice. Well, it isn't more than I expected he'd come to. He's bound to be caught, and then he'll swing for his crime."

"Who says that Rufus Gray killed Simon Larue?" replied Ralph indignantly.

"I say so for one, and the police are sure of it, for everything points to him. At any rate, he hasn't been seen since he left here last night after nearly killing Simon and then threatening to finish the job at the first chance. If he isn't guilty, what made him run away?" said the tavern keeper triumphantly, as if that clinched the argument.

"I don't believe he ran away. He had no cause to do so. Something must have happened to him," replied Ralph, who really was greatly puzzled to account for the foundryman's disappearance.

"Bah! Tell that to the marines. What could have happened to him? No, no; he's gone to Canada to hide himself from justice. Didn't you and that blamed government detective see a man answering to his description come out

of Simon's house immediately after the shot was fired which killed the old man? And that reminds me, there is a subpoena for you behind the bar. You've got to appear at the coroner's inquest to-morrow morning."

"I admit that I saw a man of about his size come out of Simon's house after I heard the shot, but it wasn't Rufus Gray. Mr. Gray doesn't wear a soft-crowned hat, nor a long overcoat, and that is what the man wore."

"He must have borrowed them for the purpose of disguising his identity; but he couldn't disguise his figure," said Mr. Bates.

"You can say all you want, uncle, but I know it wasn't Mr. Gray who shot Simon Larue," said Ralph stoutly.

"Bah! Don't talk to me. You're prejudiced in his favor," said the tavern keeper angrily.

"And you're prejudiced against him," retorted the boy.

"And I suppose the police are prejudiced, too?" sneered Mr. Bates.

"No, I don't say they are, but they're on the wrong scent. While they are wasting time looking for him the real murderer will be able to escape."

"Look here, you thick-headed noodle, don't you know that Gray owed Larue money that he couldn't pay?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know that Larue told him he would fix him for that assault by having him up before a magistrate this morning?"

"Yes."

"Very well; there you have two motives for the crime. Add to them the threat that Gray made against Simon in this room before he left, and his sudden flight from town, and what more do you or any reasonable person want to prove that he's the guilty man?"

"I admit that circumstances are against him, but they don't prove anything."

"Many a man has been hanged on circumstantial evidence."

"It's too bad that Simon Larue died before he could name his murderer."

"I agree with you there, for he certainly would have accused Rufus Gray."

"No, he wouldn't. He would have named another man."

"How do you know that?" asked the tavern keeper sharply.

"That's my opinion."

"Pooh! Your opinion isn't worth anything."

"Is that so? Maybe you'll find out differently before you're much older."

"Don't you talk to me in such a sassy way! I won't have it, do you understand?" roared Mr. Bates.

A row between uncle and nephew seemed on the tapis, but fortunately at that moment the housekeeper came into the room and announced that supper was ready, and that cut the matter short.

Mr. Bates told Ralph to look out for the place while he ate his supper, and thus left alone, the boy opened the evening paper and began to read the story of the murder, and the reasons why Rufus Gray was suspected of being the assassin.

The reasons were practically what Mr. Bates had just stated, and though Ralph could not but admit that things

looked dark against Nellie's father, he took comfort in the thought that he knew the person whose initials were C. D. was the murderer, and he deeply deplored the disappearance of the evidence he had to prove that fact.

Ralph remained in the barroom till his uncle returned, and then he went in to his own supper.

That finished, he started out to call on Nellie Gray, who he knew must be not only wild with anxiety over the unexplained absence of her father, but almost broken-hearted over the knowledge that suspicion pointed its finger at the author of her being, and connected him with the cowardly murder of Simon Larue.

As he laid his hand on the gate leading into the cottage he made out the outline of a policeman standing in the shadow of a tree in the yard.

"So a steady watch is being kept up on the chance that Mr. Gray might return to see his daughter," thought Ralph. "It's like the police to follow up the wrong end of a case."

He knocked on the door, and it was presently opened by Nellie.

The poor girl looked like a wreck, and Ralph was sorry for her.

She burst into tears on recognizing him.

"Don't cry, Nellie," he said, shutting the door and putting his arm around her waist in a sympathetic way.

"How can I help it, Ralph?" she sobbed. "I have not seen my father since he went out after supper last night, and then to think he is accused of—of—"

She broke down, and laying her head on the boy's shoulder, wept as if her heart would break.

"Don't worry, little girl. Your father is bound to turn up all right, depend on it. As for him being accused of killing Simon Larue, why, mere suspicion isn't proof, and you and I know he is innocent of such a crime."

"He never would do such a thing."

"Of course he wouldn't, and I have evidence, if I could only find it, that will show that another man altogether shot the money lender."

"You have? Oh, Ralph!" she cried eagerly.

"Sit here on the sofa, and I'll tell you all about it."

They sat down together and she listened with earnest attention to what he told her about the piece of lining, with the initials "C. D." on it, which was torn from the assassin's coat as he passed through the gate, and which he found; and then the letter, signed by the same initials, which had been accidentally dropped by Larue in his uncle's barroom, and which he had picked up and read.

He repeated to her the contents of the note as well as he could recall them, and gave her the deductions he had drawn from the contents as they struck him on reading it.

"What have you done with the letter and the piece of lining?" she asked eagerly.

"That's what puzzles me. I could have sworn I put them in the inside pocket of my jacket, but when I looked for them this morning they were not there."

"How unfortunate it would be if you have lost them," she said. "They would save my father from going to prison."

"I'm afraid not; but they would put the detectives on a new scent which would exonerate your father if they captured the real murderer."

Ralph remained a couple of hours with Nellie Gray, and then left her in a brighter frame of mind than he had found her in.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SURPRISE OF HIS LIFE.

"Here's that subpoena," said Obadiah Bates next morning to Ralph, when the boy came down from his room to breakfast. "See that you appear at Simon's house at ten o'clock."

"I'd better go to the foundry first and tell the foreman about it, so he can send somebody to the bridge in my place," replied Ralph.

"I suppose so. You can do that easily enough. Take the paper with you to show him."

Everybody at the foundry had heard about the accident at the bridge.

In fact, every one who read the morning paper could have seen the account of it on the first page.

When Ralph appeared just before the whistle blew for starting up he was surrounded by the workmen in his department, and congratulated over his escape from death.

"Yes, I had a pretty narrow squeak of it, but I guess it won't happen again," replied the boy cheerfully.

"Upon my word, you take it pretty coolly," said the foreman, regarding him with some admiration. "You had an awful fall. McIntosh phoned me that he and the men were afraid they'd never see you alive again, until they saw the two men in the rowboat pull you out of the water."

At that moment the whistle blew.

"I'm afraid you'll have to send somebody to the bridge to take my place this morning, Mr. Brown, as I have to appear at the coroner's inquest at Simon Larue's house. I've been subpoenaed. Here is the paper."

"That's all right. I've already made arrangements for another to take your place. By the way, you'll find your jacket hanging on one of the hooks in the corner yonder. Better take it along with you. One of the men brought it from the bridge."

Ralph got his jacket and started to return home, for it was only eight o'clock, and he had two hours' time on his hands.

When he reached Rufus Gray's cottage he saw Nellie standing by the sitting-room window looking out.

She waved her hand at him and ran to the front door to admit him.

"I'm so glad to see you, Ralph," she said. "I didn't have the heart to go to work this morning. I can think of nothing but my poor father, and the accusation that hangs over his head. Oh, if I only knew where he is, I would go to him at once."

"Well, it certainly is strange where he has gone, without leaving word with one of his many friends to tell you. He must know that you would be worried about him, and he isn't the man who would treat his daughter that way," replied Ralph.

"That's the very reason why I fear something has happened to him," said Nellie tearfully.

Ralph could not but admit that she had reason to be anxious on that score, for Rufus Gray's disappearance was most singular.

It was unfortunate, too, since it strengthened suspicion against him.

The clock struck ten before Ralph was aware it was so late.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, "I thought it was only about half-past nine. I can't take this jacket of mine home now. I'll have to leave it with you till I come for it."

"I'll take good care of it," she said, as he handed it to her.

Ralph went on to Simon Larue's house.

There was a crowd of the curious gathered on the sidewalk, and about the front yard.

Two policemen stood guard at the door, and one of them stopped Ralph as he started to enter.

He showed his subpoena from the coroner and was permitted to go in.

The jurymen and a number of other people were assembled in the room which the dead man had used as his office.

The body had been removed to an undertaking establishment in the city.

Among those present Ralph recognized the custom house detective—the sharp-eyed, wiry man who had entered the house with him on the night of the murder.

Obadiah Bates was there, and two or three of his customers who had been present at the tavern when the scrap took place between Simon Larue and Gray.

Ralph, however, was the only one from the foundry.

The coroner was not there, but he arrived in about a quarter of an hour.

The jury was sworn in, and the proceedings began.

The first witness was one of Mr. Bates' customers.

He gave all the details of the trouble at the tavern.

Mr. Bates and his other customers corroborated the story.

Ralph was then called upon, and explained how he had interfered in the scrap, but he did not say that his uncle took a bung starter to knock Rufus Gray out with, much to Obadiah's relief, who was afraid the boy would show him up in a bad light.

Ralph was then asked to state what he knew about the murder.

He told all the facts the reader is acquainted with, except the finding of the piece of lining attached to the latch, and the letter subsequently in the tavern.

His silence on these vital points was due to the fact that he knew he would be asked to produce the articles, and as he could not do that, he was wise enough to know that his statement would not only go for nothing, but would place him in a rather awkward light.

The detective followed him and told his story.

The revolver and the papers connected with Rufus Gray's debt were produced by a police officer, for the government man had turned them over to the first city detective who had appeared at the scene of the crime.

The policeman reported that the suspected man, Rufus Gray, had not yet been found.

"His daughter hasn't seen him since supper on the night of the murder," he said, "and can give no reason for his absence from home."

All the testimony being in, the coroner summed up the case and told the jury to decide on their verdict.

The jury retired to a rear room, and after a brief absence returned, and the spokesman said:

"We find that the deceased met his death from the effects of a bullet wound inflicted by an unknown assailant."

Ralph was delighted that the jury did not place the crime on Rufus Grey, and he believed that his statement, as well as the detective's, about the stranger in the slouch hat and overcoat, created a reasonable doubt in the jurymen's minds as to the actual guilt of the suspected man.

The verdict, however, had no weight with the police department.

Everything seemed to point to Gray as the guilty person, and detectives were looking everywhere to find some trace of him.

As soon as the inquest was over, Ralph returned to the tavern with his uncle to get his dinner.

At one o'clock he reported at the foundry, ready to resume work.

"Mr. Desmond wants to see you in his office," the foreman told him. "You will probably find him there now."

Ralph wondered what the proprietor of the works wanted to see him for.

As a matter of fact, the owner of the Caxton Foundry, having learned all the facts about the accident at the bridge in which the boy had nearly lost his life, decided to head off any chance of a suit being brought against him for damages by Ralph's uncle, by promoting the lad to a good position.

Ralph walked to the office building and asked a clerk if Mr. Desmond was in.

"He is."

"He sent for me to come to his office. Will you tell him I am here?"

"He expects you, eh?"

"I suppose he does."

"What's your name?"

"Ralph Redwood. I'm employed in the machine room of the bridge department."

"Oh, you're the boy who fell off the bridge?" said the clerk, regarding him with some interest.

"I didn't fall off. I was knocked off by the breaking of the hoisting tackle."

"I will take your name to Mr. Desmond."

The clerk returned in a minute, and told Ralph to walk through the door marked "Private."

The foundry boy did so, and found himself in the presence of the proprietor of the iron and steel works.

This wasn't the first time Ralph had seen the boss of the establishment, but it was the first time he had been so close to him.

Mr. Desmond was a large, stalwart man, with an eagle eye and a saturnine countenance that was not particularly attractive.

He had no sympathy with the workingman, and never voluntarily raised the wages of his employees except when circumstances compelled him to.

He was a widower without children, and lived in the most expensive bachelor quarters in Detroit.

Although rich, he did not cultivate "society," as the word is understood, but he belonged to all the exclusive clubs, and enjoyed himself among his intimates.

He spent his money freely, always found a welcome among his set, but, nevertheless, was not popular.

"Sit down, my lad," said the foundry nabob in a tone that caused Ralph to look at him with some intentness.

There was a ring to it that put him in mind of the impatient ejaculation uttered by the big man who left Simon Larue's house directly after the murder.

"I understand that you had a bad fall from the bridge yesterday afternoon?" continued Mr. Desmond. "Fell off a girder that was being hoisted into place."

"Yes, sir."

"Was it an attack of vertigo owing to your inexperience in working at such a height?"

"No, sir. I was shaken off the girder by the breaking of the hoisting tackle," replied Ralph promptly.

"Hem! The foreman did not report that the girder fell into the river with you."

"I believe it didn't. The shock of contact with the girders already in place threw me out into the air, and I narrowly escaped with my life."

"Hem! Were you holding on as tightly as the case called for?"

"Yes, sir. Nobody could have held on after that shock unless he was tied."

"It appears that there was another workman on the other end of the beam, and he did not fall off."

"I don't know anything about what happened to him, sir."

"Well, my lad, we won't discuss the matter further. I sent for you to express my regret that such a serious accident happened to you while in my employ. It was doubtless one of those things that no amount of foresight can prevent. Under the circumstances I think you are entitled to some consideration. I have looked into your record and find that you are a particularly bright and efficient young workman, so I have decided to advance you in my establishment. I have been thinking for some time of employing a practical worker, familiar with the general details of bridge construction, in the office. I prefer a young man, and you seem to answer the requirements. So I will give you the opening. It will afford you an unusual chance to work yourself up to a position of responsibility. You will be given a desk in the office, and to-morrow I will explain to you what your duties will be. It is more than probable that as soon as you familiarize yourself with certain details in bridge work I shall send you to different parts of the country to examine and report upon methods employed in the building of sundry bridges now under construction. That is all at present. You may go home now, and report to my chief accountant to-morrow morning at nine o'clock."

Mr. Desmond turned to his desk, thereby intimating that the interview was over.

Ralph was so taken by surprise, as well as delighted, at the signal favor he was receiving at the hands of the owner of the works, that he hardly knew how to express his thanks in suitable words.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Desmond," he said, rising. "I will endeavor to prove worthy of the confidence you seem to place in my ability."

"Don't mention it," replied the gentleman, in a patronizing tone. "I am always glad to—my heaven! What a likeness!" he exclaimed, staring at the boy's profile, as now presented to him for the first time.

The profile in question was as clear cut as a Greek cameo,

showing the lad's firm chin, resolute jaw, perfect nose and high, aquiline forehead, with the hair falling carelessly over it.

There was beauty and power in that face, that marked its possessor as one clearly above the common.

Ralph turned and looked at Mr. Desmond in surprise. The gentleman's abrupt exclamation, coupled with his present attitude, astonished the boy not a little.

The steel magnate recovered himself almost immediately.

"That is all, young man," he said sharply. "By the way, one moment. Your name is—is——"

"Ralph Redwood, sir."

"Yes, yes; I remember now. You are living with your parents, I presume?"

"My parents are dead. I am living with my uncle, Obadiah Bates, on the River Road."

"Your age is——"

"Eighteen, sir."

"Brothers or sisters?"

"No, sir."

"Hum! That is all, young man. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Desmond," said Ralph, bowing himself out. "Lord, but I'm in great luck!" he mused as he left the foundry. "A job in the office, with the chance to work myself up to a position of responsibility. What will Mr. Bates say when I tell him? Why, he'll think I've fallen into a butter tub, as the saying is. It has always been my ambition to get a position where I could use my brains instead of my hands, and it looks as if the opening has turned up. I never dreamed it would come so soon. I guess that was a lucky tumble I got off the bridge, for it seems to have introduced me to the notice of the boss of the business. I've got ideas on bridge construction that may make me solid with him, and if I once get solid, well, say, I'll be right in it! Gracious! I'm so tickled that I feel like doing something to let the steam off."

Thus Ralph communed with himself as he walked off down the River Road, probably the happiest boy at that moment in all Detroit.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"Well, what brought you back?" asked Obadiah Bates, as Ralph walked leisurely into the tavern.

"Why, my legs, Uncle Obadiah," laughed the boy. "You don't suppose I could afford an automobile, do you?"

The tavern keeper frowned at his nephew's reply.

"Why aren't you at work?" he asked severely.

"Because I've been relieved of my duties as foundry boy."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've been promoted, and begin my new duties to-morrow morning."

"What have you been promoted to?" asked Mr. Bates, in some surprise.

"The office."

"What are you going to do in the office? Not going to learn to be a cheap clerk, are you?" said his uncle, with a look of disapproval.

"I couldn't tell you what I'm going to do. It's something worth while, though, I should judge from what Mr. Desmond said to me."

"If you've been promoted I suppose you'll get more wages?"

"I may not at the start."

"It looks strange for a foundry boy to be promoted to the office. How did it come about?"

"On account of that fall I had from the bridge yesterday."

"Well, I ain't sure whether I'm satisfied to have you go into the office—that is, unless you get more wages. I may have to buy you a new suit of clothes, and clothes cost money."

"You won't mind that if I'm going to better myself."

"I reckon you ought to get enough extra wages to pay for them yourself."

"Maybe I will. At any rate, Mr. Desmond said it would lead to a responsible position in time if I made good."

"He said that?"

"Yes. A responsible position requires more brains than an ordinary workman needs. It is the chap who can use his gray matter to advantage who gets ahead in the world. They say money talks, but it's the brains behind the money that makes it talk to some purpose."

"Well, nephew, if this new job of yours doesn't pan out the right amount of coin, you'll hear from me on the subject."

Thus speaking, the tavern keeper turned on his heel and went behind the bar to wait on a customer.

After supper Ralph went over to see Nellie to tell her the news about his promotion, and also to let her know what had taken place at the inquest.

Nellie was glad to see him, as usual.

"I suppose you haven't heard from your father?" Ralph said.

"Not a word. It is over forty-eight hours since I last saw him, and I feel so downhearted that I don't know what to do," she replied.

"I wish I knew where to look for him, and I wouldn't lose a moment getting on the job, for I hate to see you looking all broke up. I asked several of his particular friends at the foundry, but none of them has seen him since he left the tavern the night before last."

He didn't tell the girl that the foundry men were rather dubious over Rufus Gray's strange absence from his customary haunts when taken in connection with the shooting of Simon Larue, and the suspicions of the police.

He informed her, however, that the coroner's jury did not lay the crime at his door when rendering their verdict.

They left the identity of Larue's murderer for the police to solve.

Nellie took but little comfort out of the verdict of the coroner's jury.

In her heart she was satisfied that her father was not guilty, and she grieved more over his mysterious disappearance than about the accusation that was hanging over his head.

If he would only come back she felt sure he could establish his innocence of any complicity in the terrible crime.

Ralph, after a time, brought up the subject of his promotion.

He told the girl all about it, and she appeared to be very glad to learn that he was getting up in the world.

When he went home he carried his jacket with him, and

hung it up in his closet, as he didn't expect to wear it again soon.

Ralph was in bed and asleep when his uncle closed up shop that evening.

Instead of going to bed as usual, the tavern keeper got a lantern and left the house.

He was away nearly an hour, and when he came back he put the lantern away and went to his room.

The light burned long in Obadiah Bates' room that night.

Had anybody looked in on him they would have seen him reading a sheet or two of foolscap paper, and then a number of documents, with an expression that merged from interest into astonishment, and finally into a look of crafty triumph.

Then they would have seen him walking up and down the floor of his room as if considering some weighty proposition.

Finally he took off his clothes, blew out the light, and went to bed.

Next morning Ralph thought his uncle looked at him very strangely, and he wondered what was in the wind.

He noticed that every little while Mr. Bates would chuckle to himself and rub his skinny hands together as if mightily pleased at something.

He had seen his uncle do this before on several occasions a few days after he returned from one of his periodical visits across the river, so he thought nothing of it.

A few minutes before nine Ralph walked into the office of the foundry and reported to the chief accountant.

That gentleman pointed to a new roll-top desk which had been delivered the preceding afternoon.

"Sit down," he said. "Here is a work on bridge engineering which Mr. Desmond wishes you to look over carefully. He wants you to make yourself familiar with the facts you will find in it. Take your time and go into the subject in all its bearings. If the points therein set forth suggest any new ideas of a practical nature, write them down as clearly as possible and submit them to Mr. Desmond," said the chief accountant. "Your wages for the present will be so much," and he named a sum considerable in excess of what Ralph had been receiving.

Ralph immediately tackled the job, and before an hour passed away he was quite fascinated with his new occupation.

Time passed quickly, and eleven o'clock came around.

A clerk came over to him and said that Mr. Desmond wanted to see him in his private room.

Ralph went in.

The steel magnate studied his face for some moments before he spoke, then he gave Ralph sundry instructions which he was directed to follow.

"I'm going East on important business," he concluded, "and I may be away some little time. When I get back I shall expect to find you well up in the points I have mentioned."

"I will do my best to make a good account of my time," replied Ralph earnestly.

The head of the establishment nodded and dismissed him.

Late that afternoon Obadiah Bates, to Ralph's great surprise, walked into the office and asked for Mr. Desmond.

He was told that the gentleman had left town for the East via Chicago.

Mr. Bates looked disappointed.

"When will he be back?" he inquired.

"I couldn't tell you," replied the head accountant; "but I don't expect to see him for two or three weeks."

On his way out he stopped beside Ralph's desk.

"What are you doin', nephew?" he asked, eying the book the boy was studying.

"Just killing time, uncle," chuckled Ralph.

"You look like it," replied the tavern keeper. "Are you gettin' paid for lallygaggin' at this desk?"

"I am."

"How much are you gettin'?"

Ralph mentioned the amount.

Mr. Bates looked surprised.

"Is this going to be a steady thing or just temporary?"

"It'll be steady if I make good, and I guess I'll do that all right."

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch!" and the tavern keeper walked away, wondering how his nephew had caught on to what in his opinion was a snap.

A week passed away.

Ralph went to work every morning at nine, instead of at eight, as he formerly did, and quit at five.

His former companions, as soon as they learned that he had been promoted to the office, congratulated him on his advancement, though some of the younger ones, who had been longer at the works than Ralph, felt jealous over his success.

He called every evening on Nellie, who now had an old woman friend stopping with her, to comfort the girl over the continued absence of her father, which was as much of a mystery as ever.

Simon Larue was in his grave, and a brother and sister of his had taken possession of his property, real and personal, and were arranging to wind up his loan business.

The police were still on the lookout for Rufus Gray, but with little success.

Mr. Desmond was understood to be in New York on business connected with the foundry, and his letters to his superintendent did not indicate when he expected to be back.

Ralph was doing a job for the head accountant at his desk one morning of his second week in the office when the superintendent came in and asked him to go to the closet in Mr. Desmond's private office and hunt up a certain book which he believed was there.

"Fetch it over to my office, or if it isn't there let me know," said the temporary boss of the works, as he walked away.

"All right, sir," replied the boy, hastening to comply with his request.

He entered the private room and went to the closet.

It was locked, however, and the key gone.

"That settles it," thought Ralph, recrossing the room.

As he laid his hand on the office door it struck him that he would try the key of that door in the closet lock.

"Maybe the same key fits both doors," he figured.

"There's no harm in trying, at any rate."

So he took the key out of the office door and tried it on the closet lock.

It fitted exactly, and he had no difficulty in opening the closet door.

There was a wide shelf filled with books, models of bridge parts, and other things.

Under the shelf were half a dozen hooks, on which were suspended various articles of clothing which Ralph presumed belonged to Mr. Desmond.

He got a chair and mounted, so as to reach the shelf where the books were.

Looking their titles over with the aid of matchlight, he failed to find the volume that the superintendent wanted.

In the opposite corner, at the back, and partly covered by a soft-crowned hat, Ralph saw some more books.

The boy took up the hat to lay it elsewhere, when the letters C. D. on the inner band caught his eye.

He stared at them as if he were looking at a ghost.

Those initials had never once left his mind since the night of Simon Larue's murder, when he had seen them on the torn piece of coat lining, and attached to the note addressed to the dead money lender.

"C. D.," he muttered. "The initials of the man I believe to be the murderer of Simon Larue. And this looks very like the hat the man wore down over his eyes that night."

Ralph suddenly remembered that the initials of the owner of the foundry were C. D.—Curtis Desmond.

"What a strange coincidence!" he thought, with a thrill of wonder. "Of course he isn't the C. D. who committed the crime. That would be too ridiculous to consider."

Then it was that a second rather startling coincidence struck him—Mr. Desmond was a large man, with a figure that greatly resembled the supposed murderer.

In fact, as far as physique was concerned, Mr. Desmond, Rufus Gray, and the man Ralph had seen coming out of Simon Larue's house on the night of the murder resembled one another as much as three peas in a pod.

Ralph turned the hat over and around and looked at it from every angle.

Finally he put it down, looked at the books in the corner and found the one he was in search of.

As he stepped off the chair he accidentally pulled one of the garments from the hook from which it hung.

It was a long brown overcoat.

He shoved the chair out of the closet so that he could pick the coat up.

As he stooped to get it he saw that the lining was torn on one side, but what specially attracted his notice was that the lining was a plaid.

Striking a match, he looked at it.

It was the same color and design as the piece he had picked off the latch of the gate, and, moreover, a piece the exact size of the fragment in question was missing, and from the appearance of the rent had been torn off.

"This third coincidence was even more striking than the others, and Ralph gazed with a beating heart and throbbing brain at the hole in the lining until the burning match singed his fingers and brought him back to earth.

CHAPTER IX.

RALPH DELIVERS A LETTER.

"Great Scott! What am I to think?" he ejaculated as he picked up the overcoat and mechanically hung it on its hook. "That Mr. Desmond committed that murder? Why,

that cannot possibly be! And yet the presence of the slouch hat and the coat with its lining torn and corresponding with the piece I found on the latch of the gate, not to mention this similarity of initials—what can it all mean? I am almost sure this is the overcoat that was worn by the murderer of Larue. The soft hat on the shelf, too, looks exactly like the hat he wore. It is a great pity I lost that piece of cloth and the letter. I could compare the former with the rent in the coat, and the latter with some specimen of Mr. Desmond's handwriting to convince myself beyond a doubt. It doesn't seem possible that he ever had any dealings with Simon Larue. Why, the letter, as I remember it, plainly indicated that the writer was to some considerable extent in the money lender's power. To suppose that a rich steel manufacturer like Mr. Desmond was under the thumb of such a man as Larue doesn't look reasonable. At any rate, whoever the man is, he's above the common, since he has a bank account, for he paid some of the usurer's demands by check."

Conscious that he had already wasted a good deal of time in the private office, Ralph picked up the book, locked the closet, replaced the key in the other door, and went across the yard to the superintendent's office.

In a few minutes he returned to the office and resumed the task he had been engaged upon before he was interrupted by the superintendent.

When the clock struck five and his work was over for the day, he returned home with his mind full of the discoveries he had made that day in the boss' private room.

He regretted more than ever that he had lost those two important links of evidence that he felt would figure largely in the detection of the real murderer of Simon Larue.

"I can't imagine where that envelope could have vanished to," he reflected. "I am certain as anything can be that I put it in the inner pocket of my jacket—the one I wore right along when working in the foundry—yet when I overhauled the pocket, on my way to work that morning, I couldn't find it. It is very singular. If I lost it anywhere around the house and Mr. Bates found it, he certainly would have turned it over to the police, as I intended doing at the time. I wish I could find it. It would settle doubts that have arisen in my mind, and would be of great help to Mr. Gray when he turns up and is arrested."

Ralph made good use of his opportunities during the next three weeks, and had mastered information about bridge building, assisted by the superintendent, who had orders to enlighten him on certain points, that was bound to advance him greatly in that branch of the business.

Mr. Desmond still remained away, and no one could say when he would be back.

His continued absence from the works was rather unusual, but it was presumed that matters of great importance detained him in the East.

Obadiah Bates asked Ralph every once in a while if his boss had got back, and the boy had the same answer to give him each time—no.

Ralph wondered what business his uncle could have with the steel magnate, but as he couldn't guess he gave it up.

He wished that Mr. Desmond would return, so he could get busy along lines hinted at by the chief accountant.

Just before Mr. Desmond left for the East he closed a contract with the Pere Marquette Railroad, of Ontario, to

build a short steel bridge across a stream that intersected the route of a new branch the company was building.

The work was to be begun within thirty days, so the casting of the girders, and other material, was begun on the day that Simon Larue was shot.

The time had now come to start the job, and for several days past car loads of steel materials had been shipped to Port Huron over the Grand Trunk road, and there conveyed across the St. Clair River to Sarnia, on the Canadian side, whence the Pere Marquette line carried it to its destination.

On the afternoon that the second shipment was made the superintendent called Ralph into his office and told him he must come in the morning prepared to go to the scene of the bridge job with him, and that he would be expected to stay there till the work was finished.

This was a surprise to the boy, but withal a pleasant one.

He was tired of the confinement of the office, with its comparatively easy work, and he longed for something that would give him active employment.

The superintendent explained that he was to assist the chief constructor, and learn all he could about the practical side of bridge work.

This suited Ralph from the ground floor up, and he went home in high spirits.

When he told his uncle that he was going to leave Detroit in the morning to assist in the construction of the Pere Marquette bridge, Mr. Bates nearly had a fit.

"Look here, I won't have you go away unless——"

"Unless what, Uncle Obadiah?"

"You make an order out for me to draw your pay, d'ye understand? I'm your legal guardian, and it's my business to take charge of your money."

"As I won't be boarding with you for some weeks, I don't see why I should give you such an order. I shall have to pay my board and other expenses where I'm going, so I'll need my money. What is left over I'll want to pay for clothes and other things I'll require when I get back."

Mr. Bates then consented to take an order for half of Ralph's pay, declaring that the boy wouldn't be called on to spend much.

Ralph, however, was growing independent, and he refused to concede anything.

The result was they had a big scrap over the matter, but Ralph came out ahead.

He wouldn't give the order, and Mr. Bates' bluff to stop him from leaving the city didn't work with him a little bit.

The tavern keeper went into the barroom in a huff, leaving Ralph to go to his room and pack his gripsack.

After breakfast Ralph hastened to join the superintendent of the works at the railroad depot, and in the course of an hour the two were speeding north toward Port Huron.

In due time they reached the scene of action, which was not far from a thriving village, where they secured accommodations at a comfortable inn.

The superintendent was only going to stay long enough to see the work started, when he would return to the works, where his presence was necessary owing to the continued absence of Mr. Desmond.

Ralph found his new duties much to his taste, and took hold with a vim that commended him to the attention of the chief constructor.

The days passed rapidly away, and the bridge gradually took shape, uniting the tracks of the Pere Marquette branch on either side of the stream.

The stream in question ran west across the county and connected with the St. Clair River.

One morning a disreputable-looking sloop came up the stream and made fast to the shore near the skeleton of the bridge.

Ralph noticed her approach, but paid little attention to her.

A small, thin man stepped ashore and came toward the bridge.

He hung around till Ralph came off the structure as the steam engine whistled the noon hour, and then he stepped up and tapped the boy on the shoulder.

Ralph wheeled about and found himself face to face with Obadiah Bates.

"Why, Uncle Obadiah, where did you spring from?" cried the surprised boy.

"I came over to see how you were getting on, nephew," chuckled Mr. Bates.

Ralph rather doubted that statement, as his uncle wasn't in the habit of showing any particular interest in him except to secure his wages.

"I'm getting on all right," answered Ralph.

"I guess you are. I've been watching you for the last half hour bossing a part of the job. I reckon you'll be building bridges yourself one of these days."

"I hope to."

Mr. Bates chuckled.

"Hope to be a young steel prince, eh?"

"Hardly that. I have made a good start, though, to attaining the summit of my ambition."

"If you became proprietor of the Caxton Foundry you might consider yourself at the top of the ladder, eh?"

"What nonsense you're talking. Some time, years hence, I may become owner of a steel foundry in the bridge-making line, but it won't be the Caxton."

"No, I s'pose not, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless something happens which ain't likely to," grinned the tavern keeper. "By the way, you ain't seen your boss down this way, have you?"

"What—Mr. Desmond?"

Mr. Bates nodded.

"Has he got back from the East?"

"He has, and is coming down here to inspect this bridge."

"That's news to me."

"When he shows up I want you to do me a favor, nephew."

"What is it?"

"Just hand him this letter."

Ralph took it and saw that it was addressed to "Curtis Desmond, Esq., Present."

"Does he expect it?"

"You mustn't be too inquisitive, nephew. All you've got to do is to hand it to him when he comes on the ground."

"He'll want to know how I came by it, so I'll tell him you gave it to me to deliver," said Ralph, putting it in his pocket. "By the way, how did you get here? By that sloop down there?"

"Mayhap I did, nephew. I reckon you don't mind how I came."

"Well, I'm going to the village to dinner. Will you come?"

"Sorry I can't accommodate you, but I've got some business to attend to."

"Shall I see you when I get back?"

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't."

"Then I'll say good-by, Uncle Obadiah, in case I don't see you till I get back to Detroit."

"Good-by, nephew, and don't forget to give that letter to your boss when he gets here. It's important."

Ralph assured him that he wouldn't forget, and then hurried away toward the village.

He met the chief constructor at the table in the inn and told him that Mr. Desmond was coming there to inspect the work on the bridge.

"How did you learn that?" asked the boss of the job.

Ralph explained how the news had reached him.

"He'll find that we haven't lost any time, and that the structure will be completed within the time limit."

When Ralph got back to the bridge the sloop had disappeared.

Next day was Saturday, and about three in the afternoon Mr. Desmond made his appearance with his chauffeur in a big touring automobile.

After he had looked the work over, and was standing talking to the chief constructor, Ralph approached and handed him the letter his uncle had given him to deliver.

The steel manufacturer tore it open and read the contents.

Whatever its nature, it had a startling effect on him.

His face turned white and he crumpled the letter in his fingers with an imprecation.

Both Ralph and the chief constructor noticed the shock the letter gave him, but they did not feel that it was their place to make any remark.

He pulled himself together, and glaring at Ralph, said:

"Who handed you this letter to give to me?"

"My uncle, Mr. Bates."

The steel magnate turned abruptly on his heel and began to pace up and down in an agitated way, while Ralph, having executed the service his uncle had requested at his hands, went back to work.

CHAPTER X.

LEFT IN THE LURCH.

Mr. Desmond had taken quarters for the night at the inn in the village, with his chauffeur, but he did not appear in the dining-room for supper, ordering it sent to his room.

After the meal he sent for his chauffeur.

Ralph was standing on the front porch by an open window when he heard the man ask the proprietor of the house if there was such a place as the Devil's Glen in the neighborhood, and if so where was it.

The boy was naturally attracted by the Satanic title, and his curiosity being excited, he listened to learn what answer the chauffeur would get.

Although he had been nearly a month at the village this was the first time he had heard any reference to the place.

"The Devil's Glen," replied the landlord, "is a wild and

romantic pass in the hills up the river. It is, as near as I can judge, about five miles from here. The road is good, but to reach the glen you have to branch off into the woods at Pulpit Rock, four miles and a half from here, and that last half mile is not pleasant nor easy traveling. Years ago the glen was a retreat for smugglers. They used the house there as a storehouse for fine French cognac and other liquors, which they subsequently carried down the stream to the St. Clair River and landed at certain points along the Michigan shore. The trade was finally broken up and most of the gang landed in prison. I have never been there myself, so cannot give you any description of the glen, but if you are curious on the subject I can refer you to several persons in the village who have been there."

The chauffeur thanked the landlord for the information, and without expressing any desire to meet any one familiar with the spot, left the room.

"The Devil's Glen must be quite an interesting place," thought Ralph. "Now that I know how to reach it, I must take it in, and to-morrow will be as good a time as any. It's a wonder I never heard about it before. The people around here must take very little interest in the spot, or somebody would have called my attention to it."

The chief recreation Ralph had indulged in since he came to that locality was a row on the river.

Whenever the night was fine he got the rowboat used by the bridge builders and took a spin either up or down the stream.

The present evening, though somewhat cloudy, with an uncertain look in the sky to the southeast, tempted him to indulge in the aquatic exercise, so he walked to the uncompleted bridge, got into the boat, and started up the stream.

After he had gone a mile and was thinking of turning back, somebody hailed him from the shore.

"Hello!" he returned. "What do you want?"

It was nearly dark, and he could barely make out the figure of a man standing down near the water.

"I want to go up the river a bit. Will you take me?"

"How far do you want to go?" asked Ralph.

"Not far," replied the man.

Ralph rowed in and took his passenger aboard.

As the fellow flashed a match to light his pipe the boy recognized him as Martin Roseberry, one of the men who had pulled him out of the Detroit River when he met with the accident at the railroad bridge.

Roseberry also recognized him.

"Why, hello, sonny! What are you doin' up here?" he asked in surprise. "Did your uncle fetch you along with him this trip?"

"No. I'm working on the bridge below here. So you know my uncle, do you?"

"Nothin' to speak of," replied Roseberry evasively.

"Here, give me the oars and I'll do the pullin', seein' as the favor is on your part."

Ralph yielded them to him, and he began pulling with long, measured strokes that sent the light craft spinning up the stream.

After they had gone a couple of miles Ralph asked him how much farther he was going.

"Not far," replied Roseberry, maintaining the same stroke.

"What do you mean by not far? We have come all of

two miles since you got aboard. I've got to row back to the bridge, and I'm afraid there'll be a change in the weather before long."

"Don't you worry, sonny. You'll have the tide with you," replied Roseberry.

Two more miles were covered, and the change in the weather Ralph anticipated began to make itself apparent.

The sky had clouded up more than ever, making the night quite dark, and there were mutterings of a thunderstorm advancing from the southeast.

The wind, too, had risen, and the prospects looked scaly for Ralph.

"I'll never be able to get back without a good wetting," he said, not particularly pleased at what he appeared to be up against. "How much farther?"

"Not more'n a quarter of a mile. You remember, sonny, that after me and Cooke pulled you out of the river you said if you ever had the chance to return the favor you'd do it? I told you not to be rash at makin' promises, but you said you'd stick by it. Well, you're returning the favor now. You're givin' me a lift up the river, so don't kick. I'm just takin' you at your word," said Roseberry, with a chuckle.

Ralph remembered his promise, and had nothing more to say.

If the man wanted to go ten miles farther up he would have made no objection.

He simply made up his mind to put up with circumstances, as he was under an obligation to Roseberry.

The storm was coming up rapidly, and it was bound to overtake him before he could get very far on his return trip, so he asked Roseberry where he was likely to find shelter until the storm blew over.

"Well, sonny, there is a hut close to where we land. You can stay there as long as you like," was the reply.

"And you—do you live around here?" asked Ralph.

"Don't worry about me, sonny. I'll take care of myself."

It was clearly an evasive answer, and Ralph began to suspect that his companion had some very strong reason for throwing him off the track.

"Well, it's nothing to me where Roseberry hangs out, nor why he doesn't want me to know anything about it. He can go his way and I'll go mine," he thought.

Roseberry now turned the boat inshore, and they presently touched the beach at a wild and unfrequented spot.

Above them rose low cliffs that seemed a part of a range of hills covered with a dense wood, and it suddenly occurred to the boy that they were somewhere in the neighborhood of the Devil's Glen.

Judging that Roseberry must be well acquainted with the neighborhood, he said:

"Do you know a place called the Devil's Glen?"

Roseberry looked at him sharply.

"Why do you ask?" he said in a gruff tone.

"I heard the landlord of the Albert Inn speaking about it after supper. He said it is up here somewhere, about five miles from the village, near the river, in a range of wooded hills. This locality, as well as I can make out in the darkness, answers his description pretty well. I'm rather curious to see it, and was thinking of coming up this way to-morrow, if it's a fine day," replied Ralph.

"If I was you, sonny, I wouldn't come. It ain't worth the trouble. There's nothin' to see but a few bald rocks and a lot of trees that you can see anywhere."

From his tone and manner Ralph suspected that he was trying to discourage his curiosity for some reason other than he stated.

"Why is it called the Devil's Glen?" asked the boy.

"Now you've got me, sonny. It's just a name, that's all."

"Was it formerly a rendezvous for smugglers?"

"Sonny, I don't know nothin' about it no more'n a babby. I ain't heard nothin' about smugglers in this part of the country. I reckon there ain't none. Now it's comin' on to rain, so you'd better get under cover as fast as you can, and I'll go my way, thankin' you for the lift you've given me, which squares our account. I've tied your boat here to this tree. When the storm is over all you'll have to do is to step in, put out and row down with the stream. You'll fetch the bridge in no time at all."

Thus speaking, Roseberry turned abruptly away and was soon lost in the darkness.

The raindrops beginning to come down fast caused Ralph to beat a hurried retreat to the hut close by.

A few minutes later the storm was upon that neighborhood, and while it lasted it proved a corker.

The thunder crashed overhead and the vivid lightning lit up the river and the surrounding country.

The wind blew a small hurricane, and threshed the waters of the stream.

The trees in the wood on the hills above and behind the hut bent and shivered under the blasts.

"Gracious! If I were out on the river now I'd be in a fine pickle," thought Ralph. "But, thank goodness, here I am, as dry as a bone, in this hut, and all I have to do is to wait till the storm blows over. I'm afraid the boat will be half full of water, and I've nothing to bail her out with. Maybe I can pull her up on the shore and by turning her partly over get rid of most of it."

The storm lasted nearly an hour, and then subsided as quickly as it came up.

Ralph left the hut and walked to the tree where Roseberry had tied the boat.

To his dismay the little craft was not there.

He looked all around, but could see no sign of it.

It was gone, having apparently broken loose from its moorings during the storm and floated off down the stream.

Ralph was, therefore, left in a nice fix, in a lonely section of the country, all of five miles from the village, and the hour already late.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUT ON THE ROCK.

"Now what'll I do?" muttered Ralph to himself. "I don't see any way other than to hoof it back to the village. As the walking isn't very good along the river, I'll have to try and reach the road, which the landlord said was first rate. I suppose I'll have to cut through the wood. I wonder if my way will take me through the Devil's Glen? Well, what of it? I'm not afraid of the name, and one glen is probably like another. Here goes."

So Ralph started to make his way over the rocks in the direction of the wood, which was not far away.

He stumbled along in the darkness as well as he could, and finally found himself in a sort of narrow defile which led downward.

He followed it, for it seemed to be the only available route.

In a little while he reached the edge of a narrow, tortuous stream.

It was about a dozen feet across, and seemed too deep to ford.

However, Ralph felt there was no call to ford it, and he kept on along its edge.

Presently he came to a place where it widened out into a basin.

Here, to the boy's surprise, he saw a small craft moored near the further shore.

He couldn't make it out very well in the gloom, but its single mast showed that it was a sloop.

There was a dim light shining through the partly open door of the little cabin aft, and Ralph heard the voices of men in there.

"I wonder what that craft is doing up in this lonesome spot?" thought the boy. "I'll bet there is something in the wind. I wouldn't be surprised if the smuggling business has been taken up again. Men will dare anything to make money. I'll bet this is the craft I saw down by the bridge around noon to-day. Uncle Obadiah came on her, I'll wager. He didn't say so, but he didn't deny it, and as there are no passengers carried over the branch yet, for it isn't in running order, he couldn't very well have come any other way, except by a team. That reminds me of the strange stories I have heard about Uncle Obadiah being mixed up in some smuggling enterprises. I never believed them, though he did go to Canada once in a while on errands, the object of which I never learned. I'm beginning to think now that Mr. Bates is mixed up in things that are bound to bring him to grief if he doesn't look sharp. I'd give something to learn if Uncle Obadiah is aboard that sloop. I'll wager that Roseberry is there. I'm sure now this is the spot he was bound for, for there does not appear to be any houses in this neighborhood. If this is a nest of smugglers I'm not going to butt in. My uncle may be hand and glove with them, and I have no wish to get him in trouble. Well, I must get on. I don't want to be up all night."

Ralph started ahead again, and soon entered a wooded ravine, which wound around through the hills.

Presently he found himself in a space or depression among the hills.

It was the Devil's Glen, though he was not aware of the fact.

It was a truly wild and romantic spot.

Rocks rose on all sides, and there were trees in abundance.

Perched upon one of the rocks, embowered among trees that grew up its sides and all over its summit, was a rude cottage.

Access to it was to be had only over a slender plank that reached from the ridge of rocks opposite.

Ralph didn't notice the cottage, but he did notice a path running up to the summit of the ridge, which was on the edge of the wood.

Judging that was the way toward the road, though he saw that his course would lie through the wood, he took it and began the ascent.

Reaching the line of trees at the top, he happened to glance across the plank, wondering what it led to, when he saw a light shining through what appeared to be a window.

"There's a house on that rock as sure as eggs are eggs. A strange place for a dwelling, truly. I'll bet that is where the smugglers the landlord spoke about used to have their rendezvous. This, then, must be the Devil's Glen. It isn't a bad name for it. I guess I'd better take Roseberry's advice and keep away. I might get into a pickle."

After satisfying his curiosity as well as he could in the gloom, he turned to continue his way to the road, when he heard footsteps approaching through the wood.

Having no desire to encounter a stranger at that hour in that deserted locality, he stopped and waited for the man to pass.

The newcomer soon came into view.

He was a large, stalwart man.

Emerging from the wood, he came to a stop near the plank which crossed to the rock on which the house stood.

He looked at the plank, and then placed one foot on it, as if testing its stability.

At that moment the moonlight shone through a rift in the clouds.

It fell across the man's features.

Ralph uttered a gasp, for he recognized the newcomer as his boss, Mr. Desmond.

The young bridge worker was never so surprised in all his life.

The presence of the rich steel manufacturer in such a place struck him as being decidedly curious.

While Ralph was hazarding a hundred conjectures, Mr. Desmond ventured out on the plank, and with great caution passed over to the rock.

Reaching solid ground, he walked straight for the door of the cottage.

Seated before a fire in an open hearth, in the only room the cottage seemed to boast, was Obadiah Bates, smoking a briar-root pipe.

He was the sole occupant of the place.

"Eleven o'clock," he muttered, glancing at a small time-piece on a shelf. "It's time my visitor were here. The storm will not have kept him away. He will be more afraid of my words than the rough weather. Well, to-night shall make me independent for life, or there will be a change in the ownership of the Caxton Steel Foundry."

At that moment there came a rap on the door.

"This is he, or I'm no judge of human nature," said the tavern keeper, rising and going to the door. "Who is there?" he asked aloud.

"Desmond."

Mr. Bates shot the heavy bolts, opened the door and admitted his visitor.

"Sit down and warm yourself, Mr. Desmond," said the tavern keeper, in purring tones. "Your garments must be damp."

The steel magnate walked to the fire and stood before it with his profile presented to Bates.

Suddenly he wheeled around and faced the little man.

"Your letter informed me that you had a paper to sell me—a paper which you assert concerns me greatly, and which you say came into your possession through the death of Simon Larue, the money lender. Where is this document

on which you have placed an unnamed monetary value? I should like very much to see it."

"You shall. I don't expect you to buy a pig in a poke."

Mr. Bates went to a drawer in a cupboard and returned with a couple of folded sheets of foolscap.

"There it is. Read it, and confess that it is worth a hundred times its weight in gold to you," he said in an oily tone.

Mr. Desmond took the paper, opened it, and began to read by the firelight.

For a moment or two only the crackling of the wood in the fireplace broke the silence, and then there was a slight crashing sound outside of the cottage.

Obadiah Bates pricked up his ears and listened intently.

The noise, however, was not repeated, and he was reassured, thinking it was the wind that had blown a broken branch against the house.

Mr. Desmond's face changed as he read the paper through, his fingers clinched and his breath grew thick and labored.

Clearly he was moved by an intense emotion.

Mr. Bates puffed his pipe and observed him with an air of triumphant satisfaction.

The red gleams of the fire threw their faces and figures out boldly.

The tavern keeper looked the picture of malicious cunning, while the rich manufacturer resembled a man who has been almost overwhelmed by a sudden stroke of ill fortune.

At that moment a small window slowly and softly opened at the back of the cottage, where the shadows hung thick and the flickering rays of the fire did not quite reach, and a boyish face appeared in the opening.

His eyes were fastened on the two figures before the fire a few yards away.

They gleamed with interested attention, while his heart throbbed faster than usual, for he instinctively felt that something of great moment was on the tapis.

"Well, what say you to that, Mr. Desmond?" said Bates, as the magnate finished the last word and slowly refolded the double sheet with a trembling hand. "Is it not worth——"

"It is worth nothing," replied Mr. Desmond, straightening up and towering above the little tavern keeper with a look of sudden determination on his resolute features.

"Worth nothing?" chuckled the little man. "He, he, he! You are a comical ras—I mean gent. You know that if the contents of that paper were made public—or shall I say placed in the hands of a lawyer in the interest of the heir, who I can put my hand on at any moment, you would have to relinquish——"

"You are mistaken, my artful friend," answered the magnate grimly. "This paper will never do me any harm—never!"

With a quick movement he flung it into the roaring flames, where it caught fire and blazed up instantly.

"There," he said, with a look of relief and ill-concealed triumph, "what think you now, Obadiah Bates? It isn't worth its weight in ashes. Who holds the upper hand now, eh? You or I?"

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER HIS THUMB.

The moment Mr. Desmond threw the paper into the fire he interposed his bulky form between it and the little tavern keeper, evidently for the purpose of stopping Mr. Bates from attempting to rescue the document.

The action was thrown away, for the tavern keeper didn't even move, or show the slightest emotion at the destruction of the paper upon which he had laid so much stress.

The steel manufacturer was unprepared for such a show of apathy on his part, and his look of triumphant satisfaction changed to one of surprise.

"What say you now, Mr. Bates?" he asked.

"Why, that if I wanted any proof that you are an infernal scoundrel you have just given it to me. You have also given yourself a bit of useless trouble," answered the tavern keeper coolly.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Desmond.

"That the paper you have just thrown into the fire was but a clever copy—the original still is mine. Now who holds the ace?" he chuckled, rubbing his skinny hands together with the most intense satisfaction.

"Do you mean that?" roared the steel magnate, his face growing as black as a thundergust.

"I do. Was it reasonable to suppose I would trust such a precious document in your hands? You must think I am as great a fool as you are a rogue."

"You rascal! I'll have your life!" cried Mr. Desmond, making a grab for the little man.

Obadiah Bates stepped aside and drew a revolver.

"Take it easy," he said, covering the steel manufacturer. "It isn't worth while for you to get excited."

"The original of that paper, where is it? I must have it, and the other documents as well!" cried Mr. Desmond in a savage tone.

"Well, there is a way to get them."

"I must then negotiate with you for them?"

"It's your only plan. Didn't I invite you here for that purpose?"

"Put away your revolver and we'll talk it over."

"Now you're acting reasonably. Take that chair and I'll take this one. It is well to have a safe distance between us. If Simon had taken that precaution he probably would be attending to business as usual to-day. You took him unawares, and——"

"What's that?" roared Mr. Desmond, springing on his feet, his face an ashen hue.

"What's the use of exciting yourself?" said Mr. Bates, fingering his revolver in a careless way, with the muzzle pointed at his visitor.

"Do you mean to say that I——"

"Killed Simon Larue? You certainly did."

"You're an infernal——"

"Don't be alarmed. There is no one here but ourselves, and the secret won't get out unless—unless we fail to come to terms; but that isn't likely. I don't take you for a fool."

"How dare you say I killed Simon Larue? Hasn't it been shown conclusively that one of my foundry hands, Rufus Gray, who owed him a sum of money which he couldn't pay, is the man who shot him? The fact that he

fled the city ought to be evidence enough to substantiate the charge."

"Yes, I thought at first that Gray was the murderer, but I have found out differently since. Let us drop the subject. It must be unpleasant to you, and has nothing to do with the business in hand."

Mr. Desmond glared at the little man as if nothing would have pleased him better than to have seized him by the neck and choked the life out of him.

The sight of the revolver lying across Mr. Bates' knee prevented him from attempting any such a proceeding.

"Well, name your price," said the magnate in a surly tone.

"One hundred thousand dollars in cash," replied the tavern keeper.

"One hundred thousand furies!" roared Mr. Desmond. "Do you think I'm made of money?"

"The commercial agencies rate you at a million and a half. The foundry, I mean, but you are the foundry. You see I am reasonable. I don't even ask you to come up with a tenth part of your wealth. In fact, it isn't your wealth at all, but my——"

"I'll give you \$50,000."

"No, it isn't enough, Mr. Desmond. I could demand a quarter of a million if I chose to, and you'd have to cough up or take the consequences, which are somewhat complicated by reason of the murder of Simon Larue."

"But such a sum as you demand is outrageous," said the steel manufacturer.

"Your security and peace of mind is worth every cent of it. You have made a large fortune out of the property that by rights belongs to another. You took advantage of your position as guardian and protector of a very little boy to put through a scheme which defrauded him of his rights. Fortunately, you did not go to the extreme that you did in the case of my good friend Simon, for though there is a tomb in Elmwood cemetery dedicated to the memory of little Jack Sterling, and there is a coffin buried six feet below the surface, the boy's body is not in it. The epidemic failed to carry him off, but the close call he had of it gave you the idea that you worked out. That boy lives, as you know, and is to-day, by a strange combination of circumstances, one of your smartest young employees. He's sure to make his mark if he lives, and there is no particular reason why he should die before his time. Well, how about the terms? Do you accept them?"

"You've got me on the hip, so I suppose I'll have to. I can't settle the deal now, because to give you a check for a hundred thousand would not be convenient as matters stand."

"My terms are cash—checks not accepted."

"Well, call at my home with the document three days from now, and——"

"At your house! Oh, dear, no. 'Will you walk into my parlor?' said the spider to the fly—not precisely!"

"Where, then, are we to conclude our business?"

"Where? At my tavern on the River Road."

"It wouldn't look well for me to go there. Why not my office at the foundry, after business hours?"

"All right. Immediately after business hours, and before it gets dark."

"I see you mistrust me."

"Why shouldn't I? The stake is a large one, and I'm no match for you from a physical point of view."

"Well, now that we have finished our business, I'll take my leave. Will you see me through the wood as far as the road?"

"I will, but you must walk in front."

"Why so?"

"I'm taking no chances, though if anything happened to me you'd only have to deal with a third party, or perhaps face certain exposure and consequent ruin," said Obadiah Bates.

"Then you haven't got the document here?"

"No. I merely borrowed the use of this hut for the night as the safest place for us to hold this meeting."

"You're a clever rascal."

Mr. Bates grinned as if he appreciated the words as a compliment.

He took a lantern, lighted it, and then intimated that he was ready to go.

Mr. Desmond preceded him outside.

"I'll hold the light for you to cross the bridge. I shouldn't like you to break your neck until after I have done with you."

"You are very considerate," replied the steel magnate ironically.

"It's a weakness of mine when I have anything at stake," said Mr. Bates with a chuckle.

Neither was aware that a pair of boyish eyes followed their movements, and that the owner of the eyes heard every word they said.

Mr. Desmond walked slowly across the slender plank and stepped on the bluff on which the outward end of it rested.

The tavern keeper followed a couple of yards behind with the lantern raised at arm's length.

He thought if he maintained that distance in the rear he would be perfectly safe.

He failed to figure on the resourcefulness of the bigger rascal he was dealing with.

An idea flashed through Desmond's mind as he crossed the plank.

He was in a desperate frame of mind over the price the tavern keeper had exacted of him.

He was willing to take chances of what might happen after the exit of Bates from his present sphere of usefulness.

Unknowingly the tavern keeper placed the temptation within his reach when he sent him ahead along the plank.

Mr. Desmond had noticed when he first crossed the board that it was not attached in any way to the bluff.

A good kick would send it flying down into the depths below.

The distance was not so much, but it was enough to make it a hazardous risk for any one to plunge down it.

The steel magnate, having calculated all the chances, decided on his course.

The moment he reached the bluff he gave the board a kick with all the power of one of his muscular legs.

The board went spinning into space.

With a wild cry of terror Mr. Bates followed it.

A streak of lantern light followed his downward flight.

The thud of a body striking the ground simultaneously

with the crash of glass and the extinguishment of the light reached the ears of Desmond, and also the ears of the boy, whose retreat from the rock was now cut off, apparently, and then silence ensued—silence that would have been profound but for the wail of the wind.

After one look down, the steel magnate, with a shudder, hurried into the wood, and the crashing sounds accompanying his passage through the bushes soon died away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

"My gracious!" cried the sole eyewitness of this dastardly crime. "What a villain Curtis Desmond is! He is the murderer of Simon Larue, and now I fear he has killed my Uncle Obadiah. I would go to my uncle's aid, if aid is of any use to him, were it not for the fact that I'm marooned on this rock, forty feet or more above the ground. What am I to do? If Uncle Obadiah is dead the crime can never be brought home to Mr. Desmond, for when I accuse him he'll deny that he was here, and his word would be as good as mine in a court of justice—better, in fact, since he is a man of wealth and position, while I am only one of his employees."

Thus reasoned Ralph Redwood, and his reasoning was good.

"If I could find a rope in that cottage long enough to reach within jumping distance of the ground, I could make my escape from this place," he said.

Ralph decided to look for one.

The door of the cottage was locked, but he had seen Mr. Bates put the key under a flat stone near the door.

He looked for it and found it.

Then he entered the cottage.

He threw a few pieces of wood on the fire to make it light up the room.

The bright glare presently revealed every part of the interior.

There wasn't anything that looked like a rope in the place.

Much disappointed, he stood looking at the floor.

Almost beneath his feet he saw the outlines of a trap-door.

Seizing the brass ring at one end of it, he opened the trap, which worked on hinges.

He saw a rope ladder leading down into the hole.

"That will be just the thing, if it's long enough," he said.

Detaching it from the pair of hooks from which it was suspended, he pulled it up and found that it was of considerable length, maybe thirty feet.

Taking a bit of candle and some matches he found on the dresser, he lighted the former at the fire, and then, with the rope ladder on his arm, left the cottage.

Placing the topmost rung of the ladder over a stump he found on the edge of the rock, he descended to the lowest rung.

Then he dropped the lighted candle straight down.

It struck the ground a dozen feet below.

"I can make it," thought Ralph, lowering himself till he clung with his hands from the lowest rung.

He calculated on a drop of seven or eight feet as he let go, and his calculations proved correct.

He alighted on the ground with a slight shock.

Lighting a match, he hunted for the candle, found it, lit it, and started to find his uncle's body.

He found it extended at full length on the ground.

Mr. Bates was not dead, as Ralph could tell from his heavy breathing, but he was unconscious and no doubt badly hurt.

"I know what I'll do. I'll carry him to the sloop in the basin. The men on board of her are without doubt his friends, and they may be able to pull him around," thought Ralph.

So the boy gathered his lightweight uncle up in his arms and left the Devil's Glen with him.

Ten minutes later he reached the basin at the point where the sloop was moored to the shore.

There was no sound aboard of her now.

The persons in charge of her were asleep.

Ralph soon aroused them by stepping on board and shouting through the partly open cabin door.

"Hello! Who's there?" asked a voice in the darkness which sounded to Ralph like Roseberry's.

"Is that you, Mr. Roseberry?"

"Ay, ay; and who are you?"

"Ralph Redwood."

"The dickens!"

Roseberry sprang from his bunk in light attire and came to the entrance.

"What in thunder brings you here, and at this hour? I thought you went back as soon as the weather cleared."

"Never mind what you thought. Light your lamp and attend to my Uncle Obadiah."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He fell from the plank that crosses from the bluff to the rock on which the cottage stands in Devil's Glen."

"What! He fell from there?"

"Not through any fault of his. The man he was with kicked the plank off the bluff while he was in the act of crossing, and so he went down, the plank with him."

"And you saw that?"

"I did."

"What took you to Devil's Glen?" asked Roseberry suspiciously.

"I'll tell you later. I want you to look after my uncle. I'm sure he's badly, if not fatally, hurt."

Roseberry's companion, Sam Cooke, who had been listening to the talk, now came to the door.

"Light the lamp, Sam," said Roseberry. "Now, where is your uncle, my lad?"

"On the ground close by. Come, I've got a candle. I'll light it and you can look at him."

Roseberry, who was a graduate of an English medical school, examined the old man carefully, and then said that his goose was cooked.

"He won't live twenty-four hours, perhaps not twelve," he said, shaking his head. "He is injured internally, and I judge is also suffering from concussion of the brain, but of that I'm not sure. You say the man who was with him shoved the plank off the bluff?"

"Yes."

"Then his purpose was to murder Bates?"

"There is no doubt of it."

"You saw the crime committed?"

"I did."

"Would you recognize the rascal if you met him again?"

"Easily," replied Ralph, who did not intend to tell Roseberry that the man was Mr. Desmond, the millionaire steel manufacturer.

"Sam has the lamp lighted. Help me carry your uncle aboard the sloop."

Ralph lent a hand, and the dying tavern keeper was soon lying on a spare bunk.

Roseberry poured some cognac down his throat and took other means of reviving him.

After a time Obadiah came to his senses and looked vacantly around him.

His gaze finally rested on Ralph's face.

Feebly beckoning the boy to him, he said:

"I'm as good as a dead man, nephew. I've been murdered by the rascal who shot Simon Larue, and for the same reason, because I have it in my power to ruin him. I don't know how it happens you are here on board the sloop, any more than I know how I happen to be aboard of her myself, but it must be the work of Providence, for I have something to tell you—something that will surprise you and make a complete change in your life. Give me another sip of the brandy."

Ralph handed it to him.

Under its stimulating influence he grew brighter.

"The first thing I have to tell you," continued the tavern keeper, "is that I am not your uncle."

"You are not my uncle!" exclaimed the boy, astonished.

"No. I'm no relation to you. You were given into my care when you were a child of three, and I brought you up. I received a small sum of money to take charge of you, supposing you were the son of a poor man who was on his last legs with the consumption. But you were not the son of a poor man—on the contrary, you were the son of a rich one. He is dead and in his grave these fifteen years back, and he left you a fortune in the shape mostly of an established business."

"Why, Uncle Obadiah, you astonish me!" cried Ralph.

"I supposed I would. What do you suppose that business is?"

"I have no idea."

"The very one you are working at."

"What! Bridge building?"

"Yes, bridge building for one thing. Your name is not Ralph Redwood, but John Sterling. You are the heir of the founder of the Caxton Foundry, and the rightful owner of the enlarged plant to-day. You are really and truly a young steel prince, and Curtis Desmond is simply an usurper of the Caxton Works."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YOUNG STEEL PRINCE.

"Why, Uncle Obadiah, you can't mean that I—I am the heir you told Mr. Desmond to-night you could put your hand on at any moment?"

"Ah! You overheard that conversation? You did?"

"I heard every word of it, and saw all that passed, including the murderous attempt made on your life by Mr. Desmond when he shoved the end of the plank you were standing on off the bluff."

"Where were you?"

"Looking in through the back window of the cottage."

"How came you in Devil's Glen to-night? Did you follow that scoundrel, Desmond, from the village?"

"No; I was there by accident, but I can explain in a few words. I was rowing on the river when I was hailed by Mr. Roseberry. He wanted to go up the river, and I took him aboard. When we reached the point where he wanted to go ashore the thunderstorm came up, and while your friend went his way I took refuge in an old hut by the shore. As soon as the storm blew over I found my boat had gone adrift. I had no recourse but to walk to the village. In trying to reach the public road I came to the glen. I would have continued on but for the fact that I saw Mr. Desmond crossing to the house on the rock. Curious to learn what he wanted in such a place at that hour, I followed, and pushing in the shutter at the back of the house, was an observer of all that happened."

"Then you know what a scoundrel he is. You also know that I intended to sell you out, for which act I hope you will forgive me, now that I will soon be under the ground, like Simon Larue."

"I forgive you, uncle with all my heart."

"Thank you, nephew, I shall die easier; but before I go you shall know where the proofs are that will establish your identity and your rights. You shall also be my heir to all I possess."

Obadiah Bates then described to Ralph where the paper that would enlighten him concerning Curtis Desmond's treachery would be found, together with the proofs of his parentage and his right to the Caxton Foundry.

Then he asked Martin Roseberry to make out his will according to his dictation, which being done, he signed it, and Roseberry and Sam Cooke signed it as witnesses.

Not until Obadiah Bates sank into a kind of stupor again did Ralph begin to realize the impending alteration in his circumstances.

It seemed too astonishing to be true, and had he not witnessed the interview between his supposed uncle and Curtis Desmond he would have entertained a strong doubt on the subject.

Ralph finally turned in on a spare bunk and slept till the sun was well up and the clock indicated the hour of nine.

When he turned out he found the sloop in motion.

She was below the new bridge, and making for the St. Clair River.

"I calculate under the circumstances you won't want to return to work on the bridge," said Roseberry, "but will desire to get back to Detroit as soon as you can. As it is necessary to get Bates there either dead or alive, me and Cooke got sail up, and here we are makin' for the State of Michigan as hard as we can go."

"How is my uncle now?"

"Sinkin' gradually," replied Roseberry. "He may live to reach his house and he may not. It's a toss-up. Cooke has some breakfast ready for you in the cook room forward. Better go there and get it over with."

About the middle of the afternoon the sloop ran alongside the landing-stage at the foot of the stairs at the back of the tavern, and was immediately boarded by a government man who was in the neighborhood.

While Roseberry and Cooke were carrying Obadiah Bates, who was still alive, to his room, the customs inspector searched the sloop, and satisfied himself that there was nothing dutiable on board.

Mr. Bates died an hour later like a Christian in his own bed.

After his death Ralph went to the safe in the barroom, where the dead man had kept his money and important papers, and found the documents relating to himself in a heavy manilla envelope marked "To be turned over to a lawyer for the benefit of Ralph Redwood in case of my death. (Signed) OBADIAH BATES."

Ralph took them to his room, locked himself in to prevent interruption, and then read them.

The statement in the handwriting of Simon Larue made everything as clear as noonday.

The other papers substantiated it.

When he went to supper the housekeeper handed him the missing envelope containing Desmond's letter to Simon Larue and the piece of torn lining bearing the initials "C. D."

"I was looking over your clothes during your absence, Ralph, to see if any of them needed mending," she explained. "I found a rent in the pocket of your old jacket, and feeling around in the lining below it, I found that envelope. It may be the one you were inquiring about some time ago."

"It is," replied the boy, delighted at recovering it. "I can now fasten the murder of old Simon on the right man," he breathed to himself.

Later on he hurried over to call on Nellie Gray.

He found her in a state of great excitement and joy.

She had just received a letter from her father explaining the cause of his long and mysterious absence.

It appeared that after leaving the tavern on the evening of Simon Larue's murder he had been attacked and knocked out by two men in the dark.

On regaining consciousness he found himself aboard of a sloop in the St. Clair River.

The vessel sailed into Lake Huron, and thence to the big Island of Grand Manitoulin, in the northwestern part of Ontario, Canada, where he was taken ashore and held a prisoner without any explanation.

It subsequently appeared that this was a part of Mr. Desmond's scheme.

He succeeded in making his escape and reaching a small Canadian settlement, where he was taken ill, and was now recovering.

He sent the letter to apprise his daughter of his whereabouts.

"But he will be arrested as soon as he returns," said Nellie tearfully.

"Don't let that worry you, Nellie," replied Ralph beamingly. "The real murderer will be in jail to-morrow. I have found those proofs I spoke about, and I know the man they fit. Now I'll tell you a story that'll astonish you."

He at once explained everything to the girl.

"And you are the heir of the Caxton Foundry?" she exclaimed in amazement.

"I am, and I shall take steps to-morrow to establish my rights."

"I am so glad!" she exclaimed; but a moment after

looked a bit sad. "You will be very rich, and then—and then—you won't want to—to know me any more."

"Not want to know you, Nellie!" he cried. "Don't you worry about that. I will never go back on you as long as I live. You have been my best friend, as I have tried to be yours. I intended to win you for my wife some day. Well, I intend to do that still. Prosperity isn't going to change me toward you. Will you care for me as much when I'm rich as you have in the past?"

"You know I will if you let me," she replied blushing.

"And you will be my wife in the near future?"

"Yes, if you wish me to."

His answer was to take her in his arms and kiss her tenderly, and so their engagement and troth was ratified that night in the little cottage near the River Road.

Next morning, after making the necessary arrangements for Obadiah Bates' funeral, Ralph called on a prominent lawyer, told him his story, and gave him the documents in the case.

The boy then called on the chief of police and had an interview with him, handing him the envelope with the evidence connecting Mr. Desmond with the shooting of the money lender.

A detective was sent with Ralph to the foundry office.

Mr. Desmond was arrested at his desk, and the torn overcoat and slouch hat found in his closet.

He was taken to jail, where next day he was served with papers by Ralph's legal adviser.

An hour later he was found dead in his cell, having strangled himself with his pocket handkerchief.

The newspapers, of course, were furnished with a big sensation, and Ralph's real name—Jack Sterling—and his history were prominently set forth, with all the facts connected with Desmond's criminal efforts to maintain his false position.

When Rufus Gray got back to Detroit he was greatly astonished to learn of the money lender's death, and that he had been hunted for as the murderer.

And he was also astonished to learn that Ralph Redwood was the real owner of the Caxton Foundry.

And now, reader, our tale is finished, and we will drop the curtain, having told all the facts about the rise of a young bridge builder from foundry boy to steel prince.

THE END.

Read "THE MISSING BOX OF BULLION; OR, THE BOY WHO SOLVED A WALL STREET MYSTERY," which will be the next number (210) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

"Found with the bones of Indians supposed to have lived during the stone age!" This is the notation that goes with \$1,650.56 worth of golden trinkets and money escheated to the State of California because there was no one in Monterey county or anywhere else to claim it. The trinkets were found with the remains dug up out of a burial ground near Monterey by entomologists. The bones were surrounded by personal property, part of which consisted of gold ornaments and some crude coins.

A train running down the heavy grade of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad near Pocono Summit, June 19, stopped suddenly with a jar which almost threw the cars off the track. The fireman and conductor, climbing into the engineer's side of the cab to see what was wrong, found it vacant. A search revealed the body of Engineer M. C. Davis on the floor of a car loading platform close to the track. His head was crushed in. Evidently he had been looking out of his cab when his head was caught between the hood of the platform and the cab window. His hand was on the air brake and as the body was jerked through the cab window it must have jammed the lever forward and stopped the train.

The great result of the work of this year carried on at Memphis, Egypt, by Prof. Flinders Petrie, under the auspices of the British School of Archaeology has been the discovery of the palace of King Apries, the Pharaoh Hophra of the Bible, who was contemporary with Jeremiah, B. C. 629-588. Hitherto no palace has been known in Egypt other than the tower at Medinet Habu and some portions of a rather earlier date. The palace was 400 feet long and 200 feet broad, with a middle court 100 feet square. It was adorned with painted columns forty feet high and surrounded with stone lined walls fifteen feet thick. The approach to the palace led up through a large mass of buildings to a platform at a height of about sixty feet above the plain. In the ruins scale armor, hitherto rarely found in Egypt, was discovered. Good bronze figures of the gods were also found. What Prof. Petrie describes as a supreme piece was the fitting of a palanquin of solid silver, a pound in weight, decorated with a bust of Hathor, with a gold face of finest workmanship of the time of Apries. The great gateway and immense walls descend deep into the mound, indicating that there lie ruins of successive palaces built one over the other. Prof. Petrie prophesies that in six or eight years excavators might dig down to the earliest records of the Egyptian kingdom.

The most precious cargo of live stock ever carried in western Canada arrived at Wainwright, Canada, in the form of 341 buffaloes originally from the Pablo herd in Montana, but now transferred from Elk Island Park at Lamont to Buffalo Park at this point. Apart from their commercial value, they represent a very large part of the few hundred bison remaining to represent the millions that a few years ago roamed the Western plains. The transfer of 500 miles was a work of considerable difficulty and required a good deal of preparation and foresight owing to the agility and strength of the animals. It was all carried out under the superintendence of Howard Douglas, Commissioner of Canadian Parks. So well was it organized that no accidents occurred during the loading. At Lamont an excited bull buffalo gored a mate in the corral, death being almost instantaneous. The only losses on the road were a young cow, which in anger choked herself to death, and a yearling that was exhausted when shipped and was trampled to death by the others in the car. The train of twenty-three cars of buffaloes excited the greatest attention en route, the entire population of some towns, seemingly, turning out, and when curiosity led them to tease an animal they were rewarded with a kick against the side of a car that was heard a train length. When the buffaloes were unloaded in the new park here to-day they threw up their heels in the joy of freedom once more and started for the hills.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Towne—There was a spelling bee down at our church the other night. The pastor gave out the words. Did you hear about it? Browne—No; was it interesting? Towne—Rather. The first three words he gave out were "increase," "pastor," "salary."

"Rastus," said the neighbor, "I'd like to borrow that mule of yours." "Goodness sakes, boss," was the rejoinder, "I'd like to 'commodate you; but I's had some 'sperience wif de law. If a man is 'sponsible foh de acts of his agent, an' I was to lend dat mule out, it wouldn't be no time befo' I was arrested for assassination!"

Dorothy's father is a militia colonel, and on a recent occasion she saw him, in brave array, at the head of his regiment. "How did you like your father in his uniform?" the colonel asked his small daughter that night. "You looked handsomer than anybody else," said Dorothy, loyally, "and you held your head up as high. But I think they were mean not to let you have a drum to play on."

"A philanthropist," said the teacher, "is a person who exerts himself to do his fellow men good. Now, if I were wealthy, children," she added, by way of illustration, "and gave my money freely to all the needy and unfortunates who asked my aid, I'd be a——" She abruptly broke off to point at a boy in the rear. "What would I be, Tommy Saunders?" she asked, fixing him with her eye. "A cinch!" shouted the young student.

Two Irishmen were digging a sewer. One of them was a big, strong man about six feet four inches in height, and the other one was a little, puny man about four feet six inches. The foreman came along to see how the work was progressing, and noticed that one of them was doing more work than the other. "Look here," he cried, "how is it that little Dennis Dugan, who is only half your size, is doing nearly twice as much work as you, Patrick?" Glancing down to his partner, Pat replied: "And why shouldn't he? Ain't he nearer to it?"

THE MANIAC AERONAUT

By Paul Braddon.

The subject of the feasibility of voyaging through the air from here to Europe, by means of a supposed easterly current, has engaged the attention of numerous savants long before the abortive attempt tried some years ago.

The efforts at solving this problem have had the effect of producing the usual number of monomaniacs on the subject—a result, unfortunately, attending the inception of almost every great discovery.

Among the persons who thus sacrificed their reason on the altar of science was the late Dr. U—, one of my most intimate friends.

He was an ardent believer in the possibility and also the practicability of trans-Atlantic air voyages, and in the course of an animated discussion, which I had with him one day on the subject, said:

"Why, Doctor, mark my words. The day will come when people will think no more of crossing the ocean in a balloon than they now do of performing the voyage in a steamship. The passage will be effected in forty-eight hours, and with greater safety and less inconveniences than by sea. I wish I could get you to consent to take a trial trip with me in my new balloon, the Albatross. I have had her built at my own expense of the most durable material, and with the latest improvements attached. It is my intention to start for Europe to-morrow morning at six o'clock precisely. I wish to demonstrate to the world practically that the thing can be done, and if you wish to join me in the undertaking, and share the honor of being the first to make the trip, you will go along with me."

I was ever of an adventurous spirit, and as I was then unmarried and no particular tie bound me to earth, I, after some slight hesitation, consented to be a companion in the strange voyage which we were about to undertake.

Precisely at six o'clock a. m. of the morning of March 15, 18—, in the presence of upward of five thousand people, the monster balloon, the Albatross, containing Doctor U— and myself, majestically arose from the Capitoline Grounds in Brooklyn.

At nightfall we were really sailing over the broad Atlantic, at a height of at least two thousand feet above its surface, and in the direction of Europe.

Was the problem to be solved? Were we actually to be the pioneers of the new method of trans-Atlantic intercommunication?

It was with these thoughts that I resigned myself to sleep, leaving Dr. U— to watch during the first half of the night. How long I slept I do not know. I was awakened by a peculiar hissing sound, like that of escaping steam.

I sprang to my feet and called for the doctor.

There was no answer, but I noticed that the balloon was descending with astonishing rapidity.

I called again upon the doctor.

This time I received a response. But it came from the distended globe of the balloon itself. I looked upward, and by the light of the full moon beheld my companion clinging to the corded network which surrounded the silken bag.

"What are you doing up there?" cried I, alarmed at his perilous position.

"There is a hole somewhere," said he, "and the gas is escaping. I am trying to find the orifice and close it."

"Can I help you?" asked I.

"No," replied he, still climbing, with the agility of an ape, from one rope to another. "You would be sure to tumble off. Ah!" exclaimed he after a pause. "I've got the hole, but it is too large; I cannot mend it. We are doomed!"

He uttered the last words in a prolonged wail, and sliding down the rope, descended into the boat where I was.

"Doomed!" gasped I, turning pale as death.

"Gone, forever gone!" murmured he, wringing his hands in the deepest agony. "All my fond hopes blasted. The experiment upon which I relied to crown my years of toil and labor with success has turned out to be a failure. Accursed balloon, I hate you!"

He drew a long dagger from his vest as he uttered the last words and began to reascend the ropes.

"What would you do?" cried I, horror-stricken by his actions.

"Stab to the heart the infernal machine which has betrayed all my dearest aspirations."

He laughed wildly as he shrieked rather than spoke these words.

A new and horrible fear was added to the terror which already had taken possession of me.

"Desist!" cried I, catching hold of his legs. "The balloon is rapidly descending; we may reach the surface of the ocean before it collapses. Our boat will sustain us, and perhaps keep us afloat until rescued by some passing vessel. Madman, would you destroy our last remaining chance of saving our lives?"

"Yes," yelled he. "The world shall never know that I have failed."

Kicking himself free from my hold, he continued to climb upward, while I, rendered desperate by the situation of affairs, likewise ascended. Holding to the ropes with one hand, I wound the other around his waist and sought to pull him down.

What a terrible struggle it was! All alone in the dark night and in mid-air, clinging desperately to a damaged balloon; fighting, not for life, but for the privilege of prolonging it for perhaps a minute or two, with a furious maniac, armed with a gleaming dagger.

I am naturally a powerful man, but I was conquered by the maniac. I felt the sharp blade enter my shoulder; I uttered an ejaculation of pain, released my hold on my opponent and the balloon, and fell.

Down, down I went. I seemed to be shooting through interminable space; ten thousand demons were shrieking in my ears; a sea of flame was lashing its lurid waves around me. Unconsciousness came to my relief, and I knew no more.

When I recovered consciousness it was broad daylight, and I found myself lying on the deck of a vessel. I had been discovered floating, insensible, in the water, and brought to life again.

I related the adventure through which I had passed as well as I could in the feeble condition in which I was, and inquired for my companion.

The crew had, however, seen nothing either of him or the balloon.

Before the day was over, however, both were picked up, the former a corpse, the latter with a long rent in its silken side.

DUELING IN THE DARK

In such a life as mine one sees many dangers, necessarily so, and the various perilous adventures passed through are apt to be of a nature constituting them either thrilling, horrifying, exciting, or otherwise.

From the many through which I have passed I recall one as standing out in startling relief from the rest from its very singularity, the like having never been written of before to my knowledge.

In the fall of 1863 there came up from the South, Louisiana, I think, a party by the name of Colonel Le Moyne, who had lost a great amount of property in consequence of the war, and had saved from the bulk of his immense fortune only a mere pittance, perhaps sufficient to maintain him in a plain manner for the rest of his days if handled with care and forethought. But what was such a scanty income to a man who had lived on the best in the land, drank the costliest of imported wines, and entertained foreign noblemen in a princely manner?

His losses preyed upon his mind greatly, a thing apparent to those who knew the man, and people said that his grief over the loss of his proud position in the world would yet bring him prematurely to the grave.

I lived near him, and we were soon on speaking terms, and from that came to visit one another, passing a pleasant hour over a cigar and a cheering glass of old wine.

Mrs. Le Moyne, the colonel's wife, one of the stately, handsome old brunette ladies that are met with in Louisiana, bore the loss of wealth and station with much more serenity of mind than did her husband.

We, Mrs. Le Moyne and myself, conceived a great friendship for one another, and she, in an intelligent manner, recounted to me the incidents of several duels which her husband had taken part in, either as principal or second, and thus I learned that the colonel was a noted duelist, who had wounded six men and killed one outright in the course of his life.

The colonel noted the friendship springing up between us, and although he made no remark upon it, I concluded that it would be wisdom on my part to refrain from any particular attention to his wife.

One day he sent a note to my house asking me to come around to him during the evening and have a chat.

I complied, and at about eight o'clock I called upon him.

He admitted me personally, a thing that surprised me very much, but which was afterward accounted for.

"I'm all alone," he said, and I noticed at the time that his voice sounded strange and cold. "Come upstairs."

Wondering what had come over him to act thus, I followed him upstairs and into a small room on the top floor of the house.

I entered, and stared around me with surprise, for the apartment contained not a single article of furniture.

It was lit up by a single gas-jet, and that was very dim.

The door snapped to with a sharp click, and turning, I beheld the colonel glaring at me with blazing eyes.

"Mr. Clark," he said in his courteous and well-bred style, "you have dared to cast your eye upon my wife, and——"

"My dear sir," began I, "really this is an unjust accusa——"

"Silence!" he roared, and his eyes began to roll fearfully. "I say that you have done me a foul wrong. There is a stain upon my honor, and the stain must be erased with blood!"

"But, colonel——"

"Not a word, sir!" he cried as I attempted to speak. "Words are empty, and will not wipe out the insult, the base stigma that attaches to it. Villain, you have been brought here that I might avenge the wrong you have done me!"

"Would you murder me?" I cried as he drew out with either hand a revolver from two side pockets. "Would you shoot me down in my helplessness?"

"Shoot you down! Murder you!" cried the colonel. "This is worse than an insult to a man who has fought a dozen duels. No, sir! You are to fight a duel with me!"

"But I am no shot," said I, knowing not what to say, but hoping to gain time, trusting to chance that something might turn up to aid me, for I was unarmed, and therefore at his mercy.

"I am aware of the fact," blandly said the colonel, "and therefore I am going to give you an equal chance with myself. We are to fight this duel in the dark, and in this manner you, a novice, will have the same chance as myself."

I gazed at him an instant, and then my worst fears were confirmed; the colonel's brain had been turned by his troubles, and I was alone with an insane duelist.

As I gazed upon him he stepped up to the gas branch and placed his thumb and forefinger on the thumbscrew.

"Catch!" he said, and threw one of the loaded revolvers toward me, and I caught it by the butt just as the light went out, leaving us in total darkness.

"Ready!" said the colonel, and then I made haste to change my base, not caring that he should fire upon me by remembering my position.

I had scarcely moved when the report of his revolver rang out.

Trying to locate his position, I rapidly returned his fire, for I had fully made up my mind that it was my life or his, and I preferred bringing him down to being brought down myself.

A low chuckle came to my ears, and then the colonel fired back.

It was a close shot, and buried itself in the wall close to my head.

I placed my ear close to the floor, and with my nerves strung up to their highest tension, listened intently.

I could then faintly hear him crawling over the floor, which was carpeted with thick Brussels.

I thought I had a good thing on him now, and when I heard his clothing brushing over the carpet on my right I rapidly fired two shots, about a foot apart from one another, expecting that I might be able to hit him, but only a hollow chuckle answered my shot, and I knew that I had missed him again.

He made a better guess at my position, and when he fired he clipped the hair from the top of my head.

I fired back as soon as I heard the report of his pistol, and then he uttered a cry of agony, and I plainly heard him fall to the floor.

"Thank God!" I said. "At length I am out of danger!"

I had no time to say more when the cunning madman, who had been playing a clever trick upon me, fired with such accuracy that he sent a bullet through the fleshy portion of my right arm.

I yelled with pain, and he sent another shot at me, fortunately missing me, and then he laughed outright with a wild burst of glee.

Enraged, I rushed upon him, guided by the laughter, and seized him in a reckless grasp, made desperate and heedless of consequences by my wound.

I managed to knock the pistol from his grasp and flung him heavily to the floor, holding him down with a determined grip.

At that moment hasty footsteps ascended the stairs, the door was burst in, and Mrs. Le Moyne, accompanied by a policeman, who had heard the firing, rushed into the room, and the bloodthirsty colonel was then secured and hauled away.

He was placed in an asylum, and had the good fortune to recover entirely from his temporary aberration, and we are now fast friends again; but I never look at the scar upon my arm without shuddering as I recall my unpleasant experience in dueling in the dark.

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